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**THE MANAGEMENT OF PEOPLE AT WORK:
STRATEGY, HRM, DISCOURSE**

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Sociology

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the concept of strategic human resource management (HRM). Existing 'critical' approaches identify prescriptive HRM literature as 'rhetoric' that does not match 'reality'. Such an approach understands management initiatives as separate, individual, discrete, and *ad hoc*. However, this thesis develops an alternative perspective, informed by a Foucauldian approach to 'discourse', that understands 'HRM' and 'strategy' as cultural constructs that are used by actors as they 'make sense' of discursively constructed organizational 'realities'. This perspective is then utilized to demonstrate that the existing 'critical' approaches are engaged in particular practices that define strategic HRM in a way that constructs the 'gap' between 'rhetoric' and 'reality' as HRM is simultaneously created as an academic subject.

This alternative perspective provides a means of understanding and analysing prescriptive management literature and texts generated from interviews with managers in terms of two different discursively constructed 'rationalities'. Both 'rationalities' establish causal relationships between concepts of environment, organization and individual as organizational 'reality' is constructed. This perspective is utilized in the identification of the connections that are established between the managerial initiatives that are thought of as separate, individual, discrete, and *ad hoc* by the 'critical' literature.

There are two parts to this thesis. The first part describes the development of HRM, outlines a Foucauldian conceptualization of 'discourse, and re-examines prescriptive and 'critical' HRM literature. The second part analyses texts generated from interviews with HR/personnel managers in a range of public and private sector organizations. This analysis demonstrates that, while there is great variety in the descriptions of organizational 'reality', connections between concepts of environment, organization and individual are established as two key 'rationalities' are discursively constructed. It is argued that these 'rationalities' position people and practices within organizational 'reality'.

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Introduction

In introducing the first volume of the *Human Resource Management Journal* at the beginning of the 1990s, Sisson argued that the term human resource management:

‘does not yet carry as many of the negative connotations that, rightly or wrongly, some associate with the older established labels’ (1990:1).

Even if Sisson’s argument was true at the time, it is no longer so. The term human resource management (HRM) has picked up, and now carries, several negative and positive connotations that need to be made explicit before analytical work can begin.

This thesis follows Sisson’s approach of using the term ‘human resource management’ in the most general of senses to refer to ‘the policies, procedures and processes involved in the management of people in work organizations’ (1990:1). While prescriptive literature has been produced at a great rate covering a wide variety of different issues concerned with the management of people in work organizations, the dominant British analytical approach to HRM was established in the late 1980s by a ‘critical’ perspective that identified the importance of ‘strategy’ to the novelty of HRM in the prescriptive literature. However, this ‘critical’ approach has developed alongside empirical research that seems to indicate that there is little evidence of the widespread adoption of ‘strategic’ HRM in Britain. Furthermore, the ‘critical’ analysis of HRM has revealed ‘contradictions’ that suggest that strategic HRM is virtually unworkable.

The conclusion of this approach is that HRM is largely ‘rhetoric’ that is not matched by ‘reality’. This conclusion from the ‘critical’ perspective has important implications for research in this country in that subsequent research into the management of people in work

organizations is now often focused on management practices that are understood as unconnected, individual, discrete and *ad hoc* rather than integrated or strategic.

However, HRM remains as important in the latter half of the 1990s as when Sisson was writing at the beginning of the decade. It remains important for many of the same reasons. He argued that:

‘the vast majority of people earn their livelihood through some form of paid employment; the way they are “managed” at work is one of the most formative experiences they have’ (1990:1).

This indicates the main issue that this thesis addresses: strategic HRM appears to be an important and significant development in the management of people in work organizations *but* the ‘critical’ approach appears to deny that HRM exists in ‘reality’ (at least in Britain), or that it can exist (because it is contradictory). The thesis argues that this perspective, which views HRM as incoherent rhetoric, is bound up with particular practices in the ‘critical’ literature that define strategic HRM. While definition is a perfectly legitimate analytical device without which it is difficult to explain what it is that is being analysed, the key issue in this thesis is the *particular* way that HRM is defined by the ‘critical’ literature. This is because the product of the definitional practices is that particular definition of HRM which is then examined in terms of coherence and which is held up and compared with ‘reality’. It is argued that it is the definition of strategic HRM by the ‘critical’ literature in a particular way that simultaneously creates both HRM as an academic subject and the ‘gap’ between ‘rhetoric’ and ‘reality’. It will be shown that the ‘critical’ literature does not provide a ‘neutral’ definition of HRM but creates a particular version of HRM as an analytical subject which is then compared with a particular construction of ‘reality’. The processes by which HRM is constructed as an academic subject by the ‘critical’ literature are examined to demonstrate that those processes produce a *particular* construction. This is important: that *particular* construction has a significant impact on the way that research

into the management of people in work organizations is carried out because management practices are understood as unconnected and *ad hoc* rather than integrated or strategic.

This thesis challenges the conclusion of the ‘critical’ literature by utilizing concepts that have been developed in debates about contemporary cultural theory. The growing importance and utility of these concepts to the analysis and empirical investigation of organizational issues has yet to receive ‘mainstream’ recognition. However, this thesis focuses on one such concept developed from the work of Michel Foucault: the concept of ‘discourse’. A Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis provides a perspective that identifies the problems of the ‘critical’ literature as products of a particular academic approach. This alternative perspective is developed in this thesis to provide a means of understanding and analysing both prescriptive management literature and texts generated through interviews with managers. This approach will be utilized in the identification of connections that are established between managerial initiatives that the ‘critical’ literature conceptualize as separate, individual, discrete, and *ad hoc*.

In this thesis, therefore, HRM literature is reviewed and the ‘critical’ HRM literature is critiqued. The alternative perspective developed from the concept of ‘discourse’ is used to identify the connections and linkages between initiatives proposed by prescriptive HRM literature. This perspective is then used to examine and analyse transcripts of interviews with managers from several different organizations. This analysis aims to discover, first, whether such an approach can accommodate the variety found in organizational ‘reality’; second, whether managers replicate the processes of discursive construction that can be identified in the prescriptive literature; and, third, whether the effects of discursive construction can be identified. The identification of HRM as a discourse and as a ‘product’ of discourse focuses attention on how it is discursively constructed and on the effects of those constructional practices. It is argued that particular effects can be identified in the transcripts of interviews with managers. These include the construction of ‘specific

rationalities', the 'distancing' of managers from responsibility for the outcomes of management initiatives, the positioning of HR/personnel managers and practices within organizations, and the mutual constitution of problems and solutions.

The thesis is arranged in two parts. In Part One, Chapter One provides a review of prescriptive and 'critical' HRM texts. It is argued that 'strategy' and 'HRM' are interrelated in that 'strategy' is presented in key prescriptive texts as essential to the effective management of human resources and effective HRM is presented as an essential part of organizational strategy. The literature review covers usage of both concepts in prescriptive and 'critical' texts emphasising the conclusion of the 'critical' literature that HRM is incoherent 'rhetoric' that does not correspond with 'reality'. An alternative approach, based on a Foucauldian version of 'discourse', is proposed in Chapter Two. This chapter examines the concept of 'discourse', describes Foucauldian-inspired studies that focus on power, knowledge, surveillance and the constitution of subjectivity, and discusses the implications of discourse analysis for an understanding of 'strategy', 'HRM' and 'rationality'. A model is developed through which the prescriptive management literature is understood in terms of the construction of 'specific rationalities' that link apparently separate management initiatives in discourse. Three key 'objects' of discourse are identified (environment, organization and individual) and it is argued that these are linked by two rationalities, referred to as 'repertoires', that order and align them in causal relationships. Chapter Three uses the model to analyse prescriptive management literature and argues that the construction of 'specific rationalities' can be demonstrated through the analysis of the literature as a 'discourse'. The two repertoires (which are designated A and B) are described with examples from the literature. In the analysis the particular constructions of the key 'objects' are emphasised because the way that they are constructed establishes their relationship to each other and contributes towards their ordering and alignment in the two 'repertoires'. The 'repertoires' are identified separately and then combined as they appear in

discourse. Chapter Four provides a re-examination of the 'critical' HRM literature in which it is argued that the particular 'critical' version of HRM is discursively 'constructed' in a particular way as an academic subject through a number of definitional practices. The chapter argues that the conclusion of the 'critical' approach - that HRM is incoherent 'rhetoric' that does not correspond with 'reality' - is a product of particular positivist definitional practices that themselves create the 'gap' between 'rhetoric' and 'reality' and limit the possibility of finding 'strategic' HRM.

The key argument developed throughout Part One is that strategic HRM should be seen as a 'discourse' with particular cultural and historical conditions of emergence. This is as true for HRM as a product of the prescriptive literature as it is for HRM as a product of the 'critical' literature: a positivist approach towards empirical research does not treat such a discursive construct as 'reality' but sees it as 'rhetoric'.

In Part Two (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) the discourse analysis approach is utilized in an examination of interviews with managers from a variety of organizations. The texts of these interviews are analysed as examples of discourse that display a wide variety of discursive practices which reflect a range of historical and cultural conditions from which managers construct meaning and organizational reality.

Chapter Five examines and analyses interviews with HR/personnel managers in the private sector and identifies a number of management 'tales' in which the key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) are discursively constructed. Chapter Six demonstrates how these objects are ordered and aligned in terms of 'repertoires' that establish causal relationships between the key objects. Chapter Seven examines interviews with HR/personnel managers in the public sector and similarly identifies 'object' and 'repertoire' construction.¹

¹ Interviews with non-HR/personnel managers are examined and analysed using the same approach in Appendix II.

It is argued that the interviews with managers display a form of managerial 'storytelling' in which the construction, alignment and ordering of the key 'objects' in 'repertoires' represents the construction of meaning and organization-specific rationality. Furthermore, it is argued that in this process of discourse construction managers 'distance' themselves from responsibility for the consequences of management initiatives and constitute both HR 'problems' and HRM 'solutions': the discourse of strategic HRM identifies and prioritizes the problems for which the expertise of strategic HRM has solutions.

In the conclusion it is argued that HRM can be understood as a discourse that provides the means for connecting individual, discrete, *ad hoc* and apparently contradictory management initiatives, thereby constructing an organizational 'reality' for managers that 'makes sense'. This perspective suggests that a 'critical' focus on individual initiatives, to the exclusion of an analysis of how those initiatives are connected to others in a discursively constructed 'reality', produces only a partial understanding of the impact and importance of HRM to the way that people are managed at work.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE - HRM AND RELATED LITERATURE

This main focus in this chapter is on literature concerned with HRM. The idea of managing 'human resources' is not particularly new (see, for example, Miles 1965, Pigors, Myers & Malm 1973 and *The Journal of Human Resources; Education, Manpower and Welfare Policies* from 1966 onwards) and, as Beaumont notes, to some people HRM 'is simply the latest stage in the development of a body of thought which began with "human relations"...and has evolved through the organization development and change literature of the 1960s and 1970s' (1992:31-32). However, in this chapter it is argued that, while the term 'human resource management' is not new (Storey 1989:4), it has come to mean something different in recent years.

In order to emphasise this difference in meaning this chapter locates the emergence of 'new' HRM in the context of three related issues in management literature: first, the development of the concept of 'strategy' in mainstream management science; second, the influence of 'excellence' literature; third, the development of models of personnel management. Within this context the chapter identifies the emergence of two sets of HRM literature: the prescriptive and the 'critical'.

The development of the 'strategy' concept in management literature is important to this examination of HRM because, as Storey notes, 'the attribute which perhaps excites the most intense interest is that which allegedly locates HRM policy formulation firmly at the *strategic level*' (1989:6). The first section of this chapter describes the development of the 'strategy' concept and demonstrates its importance to a wide range of management literature.

The 'excellence' literature is important because, although it is not about 'HRM' as such, many of its concepts have been further developed in the HRM literature and it has been extremely influential on management thought in general. It places great emphasis on

the ‘people orientation’ as an important and primary element of the success of firms in the market place.

Without prejudging one of the main debates concerning HRM - that is, the relationship between HRM and personnel - the third section examines ‘strands’, ‘traditions’ and ‘models’ in the personnel management literature and describes the development of theories of work satisfaction, motivation, and human relations that continue to influence the HRM literature.

The fourth section focuses on the ‘new’ *prescriptive* HRM texts. From this perspective, the central texts in the ‘new’ HRM literature are Tichy, Fombrun and Devanna (1982) and Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills and Walton (1985), although a variety of contributions to the HRM literature are covered in this section. It will be demonstrated that ‘strategy’ is presented in key prescriptive texts as essential to the effective management of human resources, and effective HRM is presented as an essential part of an organization’s strategy.

The last section focuses on the (mainly British) ‘*critical*’ HRM literature which identifies two crucial problems with the notion of strategic HRM. The first concerns the coherence of the model, and the second, the ‘gap’ between the ‘rhetoric’ of HRM and the ‘reality’. The understanding of HRM by the ‘critical’ literature in terms of its problematization as incoherent ‘rhetoric’ is the key issue addressed by this thesis for, it is argued, such a problematization has an impact on what is subsequently the focus of research and debate.

Strategy

‘Strategy’ has become increasingly important in a wide range of management texts, including the HRM and personnel literature. As a concept, it has been appearing in the management science literature with increasing frequency since the 1940s (Bracker 1980:219). According to Miller (1987) it was introduced to the business world by faculty

members at Harvard Business School (1987:347). There are two major influences on the study of the concept of 'strategy' in the management science literature. The first is its derivation from the Greek *strategos* and the strong consciousness of the military origins (see, for example, Hofer and Schendel 1978, Quinn 1980, Bracker 1980). The second major influence is Chandler's (1962) definition of strategy:

'The determination of the basic long-term goals and the objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals' (1962:13).

Chandler was initially engaged on an investigation into comparative business history and viewed 'strategy' as being concerned with the long-term health of the organization. His definition is in terms of intentions and the means of achieving specified objectives. Chandler implies that structure follows strategy.

From these two starting points, the 'strategy' concept has developed and become increasingly sophisticated. For example, Ansoff argues that objectives alone are insufficient as 'decision rules' for organizational direction and focus: firms require additional decision-rules and guidelines which guide the development of the organization and are defined as *strategy* or in terms of the 'concept of the firm's business' and the 'common thread' (1987:100). Ansoff also sees an 'unfortunate coincidence' in the definitions of 'strategy'. He notes that:

'We speak of "strategic" decisions (perhaps a better term would be *entrepreneurial*), where "strategic" means "relating to a firm's match to its environment", and of "strategy", where the word means "rules for decision under partial ignorance"' (1987:115-6).

Ansoff argues that there are three principle ingredients of strategic management - the formulation of corporate strategy, the design of management capability, and the management of discontinuous change (1987:14).

Hofer and Schendel differentiate between the military concept of strategy as 'grand design' - with the three components of goals, strategies and policies - and a narrow concept

of strategy which includes goal setting and strategy formulation as two distinct, but interrelated, processes (1978:20). They define an organization's strategy as:

'the fundamental pattern of present and planned resource deployments and environmental interactions that indicates how the organization will achieve its objectives' (1978:25).

Hofer and Schendel argue for a hierarchy of corporate, business and functional area strategies (1978:27), each of which has four components:- scope, resource deployments, competitive advantages, and synergy (1978:25).

One key conceptualization that emerges from this approach to strategy is that organizations can be directed from some present position towards a future position. For example, Webb defines strategy as:

'the process of deciding a future course for a business and so organizing and steering that business as to attempt to bring about that future course' (1989:1-2).

Bracker (1980) examines the historical development of the strategic management concept in the post-war period, arguing that the need for the concept of strategy became greater as the environment changed from being relatively stable to being rapidly changing and competitive. Bracker argues from a summary of major writers' definitions of business strategy that business strategy has the following characteristics:

'an *environmental* or *situational* analysis is used to determine a firm's posture in its field, and then the firm's *resources* are utilized in an appropriate manner to attain its major *goals*' (1980:221).

Porter differentiates between competitive (business unit) strategy and corporate (companywide) strategy. *Competitive* strategy is concerned with creating competitive advantage within each of the businesses in which the company competes. He defines competitive strategies as firms' choices about the major competitive decision variables (1979:215). *Corporate* strategy is 'the overall plan for a diversified company...what makes the corporate whole add up to more than the sum of its business unit parts' (1987:43).

Porter clearly believes that strategy should be realized as a formalized plan or 'specific action steps' (1985:xv). That Porter regards formulation and implementation as

separate topics is clear although he argues that they have to be reintegrated. He emphasises the need for broad-based research. His aim is:

‘to build a bridge between strategy and implementation, rather than treat these two subjects independently or consider implementation scarcely at all as has been characteristic of much previous research in the field’ (1985:3).

Part of the rationale behind the formulation/implementation distinction is the lack of evidence of successful implementation. Reid (1989) argues that strategic plans are often not realised because of a lack of commitment and energy, and because of the relationship between the professional planners and the line managers. He suggests that, although strategy can be formulated without written documents, in complex organizations where decision-making is collective, it is unlikely that commitment can be won without such a document. However, in his study ‘approximately half of the companies could not substantiate their strategic plans’ (1989:556).

‘Strategy’ has its most rational expression formulated in the notion of strategic planning. Naylor (1982) identifies three different approaches:

(i) Corporate simulation models were mainly proforma financial planning models in which developments were mostly confined to hardware access and languages. Shim and McGlade note that, ‘by 1979, nearly every Fortune 1000 company was using a corporate simulation model’ (1989:257). Through the late ‘seventies integrated packages were developed and linked to the planning process. These packages used econometric models and took account of human factors

(ii) Analytic portfolio models that involve the division of a company’s business into ‘portfolios’. The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) portfolio model is probably the best known. It uses the concept of a ‘growth share matrix’ and on the basis of Market Growth Rate and Market Share this generates the division of the business into ‘cash cows’, ‘stars’, ‘problem children’, and ‘dogs’.

(iii) Optimization portfolio models such as the 'Strategy Based Resource Allocation Model' (BCG) and the 'Optimization Model for Corporate Financial Planning' (Hamilton and Moses).

The growth in the use of portfolio planning is confirmed by Haspeslagh (1982) who estimates that, by 1979, 36% of the Fortune 100 and 45% of the Fortune 500 industrial companies had introduced portfolio planning 'to some extent'. However, Porter argues that portfolio management is 'based primarily on diversification through acquisition' (1987:49), and that in most countries 'the days when portfolio management was a valid concept of corporate strategy are past' (1987:51), precisely because capital markets became so well developed and too many people had access to similar technology: a 'good buy' would show up on everybody's computer screen at once.

There are several alternative approaches to strategy. Bower argues for a framework that incorporates both ends and means (1982:632). He includes goal formation, strategy formation and strategy implementation, and suggests that the separation of strategy formulation and strategy implementation is 'of pedagogic value only' (1982:631). Bower goes on to argue that the division of the strategy concept, and its further sub-division, results in research in those separate areas (such as strategic planning) at the expense of research in the broader sweep of policy concerns. Bower argues the holistic case, and is more concerned with the 'life or death' issues of top management level (the 'elephants'), rather than further case studies of a local manufacturing company (the 'ants').

Quinn argues that:

'strategy is the pattern or plan that integrates an organization's major goals, policies and action sequences into a cohesive whole' (1980:3).

He suggests that the problem facing managers is that 'despite elaborate strategic planning systems, costly staffs for this purpose, and major commitments of their own time, their most elaborate strategies get implemented poorly, if at all' (1982:626). Quinn argues that when well-managed major organizations make significant changes in strategy:

‘the approaches they use frequently bear little resemblance to the rational-analytical systems so often touted in the planning literature. The full strategy is rarely written down in any one place. The processes used to arrive at the total strategy are typically fragmented, and largely intuitive. Although one can usually find embedded in these fragments some very refined pieces of formal strategic analysis, the real strategy tends to evolve as internal decisions and external events flow together to create a new, widely shared consensus for action among key members of the top management team. Far from being an abrogation of good management practice, the rationale behind this kind of strategy formulation is so powerful that it perhaps provides the normative model for strategic decision making - rather than the step-by-step ‘formal systems planning’ approach so often espoused (1978:7).

Quinn describes this approach as ‘logical incrementalism’ (1978, 1982) and emphasises that it is not the same as Lindblom’s (1959) description of the ‘science of muddling through’. He argues that formal planning practices ‘actually institutionalize incrementalism’ because most planning occurs from the ‘bottom up’, and because most plans are intended to be only ‘frameworks to guide and provide consistency for future decisions made incrementally’ (1978:15). He suggests that strategy deals with the ‘unknowable’ and that executives accept ‘much ambiguity’ (1982:613).

The key concept in alternative approaches is the notion of strategy as process. Mintzberg (1988:14) argues that there is no reason why there should be only one definition of ‘strategy’ and offers five formal definitions :- as plan, ploy, pattern, position and perspective. One of his most important definitions involves the concept of ‘emergent strategy’, which links with part of the intended strategy to form a ‘realized strategy’. Mintzberg provides a table of strategies on a continuum from ‘rather deliberate’ to ‘mostly emergent’ which includes planned, entrepreneurial, ideological, umbrella, process, disconnected, consensus, and imposed.

Pettigrew argues that Hofer and Schendel and Porter rely on a ‘rational theory of choice long discarded by process analysts as being divorced from the empirical reality of how decisions and changes are actually made’ (1985:270). The rational approach describes and prescribes techniques for identifying current strategy, analysing environments, resources and gaps, revealing and assessing strategic alternatives, and choosing and implementing

carefully analysed and well-thought-through outcomes. Pettigrew notes that the empirical process theorists have rejected the 'rational deductive view of problem solving propounded by the neo-classical theory of the firm' (1985:275). and have abandoned 'artificial distinctions' between the strategy formulation and strategy implementation (1985:270).

They accept strategic processes as 'multilevel activities' (1985:276). From this perspective:

'Outcomes of decisions were not just a product of rational or bounded-rational debates but were also shaped by the interests and commitments of individuals and groups, the forces of bureaucratic momentum, gross changes in the environment, and the manipulation of the structural context around decisions. With the view that strategy development was a continuous process, strategies could now be thought of as reconstructions after the fact, rather than just rationally intended plans... Chandler's dictum that structure followed strategy was modified by evidence indicating why and how strategy followed structure' (1985:276-277).

However, Pettigrew claims that the approach of the empirical process theorists is flawed because decision-making is treated 'just as front-stage behaviour' while there is a 'lack of concern' with non-decision-making, and a lack of development of a specified process theory to explain the description of process and outcome. Pettigrew starts from the perspective that:

'Strategic decisions and changes will be viewed as streams of activity involving individuals and groups that occur mainly but not solely as a consequence of environmental change... *Strategic* is just a description of magnitude of alteration in, for example, structure and organizational culture, recognizing the second-order effects or multiple consequences of any such changes' (1985:270-271).

Pettigrew argues for a 'contextualist' analysis that attempts to 'specify some of the language and conditions that link the multilevel analysis and processual analysis of organizational phenomena' (1985:272). He attempts to develop a unified theoretical analysis combining political and cultural views of process with a clarified methodological approach to process analysis that 'seeks to engage a process analysis of action with features of interorganizational, and social political and economic context' (1985:280).

The purpose of this section has not been to argue for a particular version or concept of 'strategy' but to demonstrate the importance of the concept to a wide range of management literature. However, in Chapter Two it is argued that the variety in definitions

of 'strategy', the variety of purposes to which the concept has been put, and the unresolved nature of debates about the concept in the management literature indicates that there is no authoritative managerial definition of 'strategy'. While this may not be a problem for the management literature Chapter Four argues that it is a problem for the 'critical' HRM literature which assumes a relatively unproblematic and generally agreed understanding of the meaning of 'strategy'.

There is a second purpose to the examination of the importance of the concept of 'strategy' to a wide range of management literature. In the second part of the thesis interviews with managers are examined and analysed. It will be demonstrated that managers, when providing an account of organizational 'reality', will utilize several concepts (such as those developed in the 'strategy' literature) within a single interview. It will be argued that no single version of 'strategy' is adequate for understanding these accounts of organizational 'reality'.

Excellence

Although the concept of 'strategy' is not particularly explicit in the 'excellence' literature the key texts are examined in this separate section for two reasons. First, notwithstanding the modesty of Peters and Austin (1985:xi), *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman 1982) has been extremely influential on management thought in general (Watson 1994b:13): in 1982 it was the best selling non-fiction book in the US (Guest 1992) and had sold five million copies by 1985 (Peters and Austin 1985:xi). Second, although it is not about 'HRM', many of the concepts have been further developed in the HRM literature. As Edwards argues, Peters and Waterman place great emphasis on the 'people orientation'. They see it as:

'an important element in the success of firms in the market place; it is not something which is secondary to other business aims but is crucial in the pursuit of these aims' (Edwards 1987:498).

Similarly, Hendry and Pettigrew argue that 'the much acclaimed *In Search of Excellence* can be read as a tribute to personnel philosophies providing the integration to corporate cultures' (1986:5).

Peters and Waterman start with a critique of 'rationality' and the strategic approach. They argue that while the 'rational model' may have been appropriate for the twenty-five years since the second world war it is no longer appropriate. They suggest that there is a 'missing perspective, the lack of any feeling for the whole on the part of the so-called professional manager' (1982:36). They argue that:

'the word "strategy" which used to mean a damn good idea for knocking the socks off the competition has often come to be synonymous with the quantitative breakthrough, the analytic coup, market share numbers, learning curve theory, positioning business on a 4- or 9- or 24-box matrix (the matrix idea, straight from mathematics) and putting all of it on a computer' (1982:30).

Their study encompassed the seven interdependent variables of the McKinsey '7-S framework' that includes 'hardware' - strategy and structure - and 'software' - systems, skills, style, staff and shared values (1982:11). From their analysis of excellent companies Peters and Waterman claim that they were 'above all, brilliant on the basics'. They identify eight attributes that emerged 'to characterize most nearly the distinction of the excellent, innovative companies' - a bias for action, close to the customer, autonomy and entrepreneurship, productivity through people, hands-on value driven, stick to the knitting, simple form/lean staff, and simultaneous loose-tight properties (1982:13). Peters and Waterman argue that it is these attributes which make 'excellent' companies 'excellent'.

Peters and Waterman emphasise the importance of 'culture' and 'values' in organizations. They claim that 'the dominance and coherence of culture proved to be an essential quality of the excellent companies...the shared values...are clear, in large measure because the mythology is rich' (1982:75-6). They argue that 'Clarity on values is...an important part of the underlying touchstone of stability and simplicity' (1982:308) and they

suggest that there is 'a value set for all seasons...quality, innovativeness, informality, customer service, people' (1982:324).

They also suggest that the excellent companies have avoided complexity with 'a basic simplicity of form' and a 'typically unifying organizational theme' (1982:308). The argument is that 'simplicity in basic structural arrangement actually facilitates organizational flexibility...because the basic form is clear, flexibility around the base structure is made easy' (1982:310). Peters and Waterman claim that simple structural form is intertwined with lean corporate staff in 'excellent' companies. The 'bottom line' is 'fewer administrators, more operators' (1982:311).

Peters and Austin (1985) continue to develop the concept of simple structural forms by arguing that fewer layers make decision-making simpler and faster. They argue that 'flat structure, in a word, automatically breeds ownership, whether you like it or not'. This means that managers will have their hands on more of the firms' business, although the increased span of control will mean that they cannot get too involved (1985:317).

For Peters and Waterman 'excellent' companies are:

'quite flexible in responding to fast changing conditions in the environment...they can make better use of small divisions or other small units. They can reorganize more flexibly, frequently, and fluidly. And they can make use of temporary forms, such as task forces and product centres' (1982:308).

Peters and Austin adapt and extend the notion of simple form by arguing that 'the surviving organization is the adaptive organization' and they identify internal and external variables associated with such organizations:

'people and leadership appear to be internal variables... customers and innovation are external. Obsessive pursuit of the customer and constant innovation mean adaptation. To pursue the customer and to pursue innovation are to be in constant commerce with the outside world, listening and thus adapting' (1985:6).

Leadership is an important feature of Peters and Waterman's argument; they claim that 'associated with almost every excellent company was a strong leader (or two) who seemed to have had a lot to do with making the company excellent in the first place'

(1982:26). Peters and Austin argue that 'the words managing and management should be discarded' in favour of 'leadership' (1985:xix).

Personnel management

The difference between personnel and HRM is the subject of one of the debates in HRM literature. However, before addressing that debate, the personnel literature must be covered in this review because, even if HRM does represent more than just a development of personnel, many of the concepts originally developed in the personnel literature continue to influence HRM.

Farnham and Pimlott identify two 'strands' in managerial thinking on the 'labour issue'. The first they see as 'essentially defensive' in that it is rooted in a 'fundamentally authoritarian' approach towards labour management which regards labour as a resource which should be subordinate to management authority (1979:38). The second strand is 'traceable from Robert Owen through to the Quaker employers like the Rountrees and the Cadburys and to the formation of the Welfare Workers' Association in 1913'. This strand holds the belief that 'business efficiency and the welfare of employees were but different sides of the same problem'. Farnham and Pimlott argue that this strand represents the origins of personnel management and the human relations approach to management. The human relations approach 'stressed the desirability of co-operative relationships between management and labour at work, good communication between them and participative or manipulative styles of managerial leadership within work organizations' (1979:38).

Mayo is usually regarded as the 'founding father' of the Human Relations movement and the 'Hawthorne Experiment' is probably the best known investigation which influenced this approach. (There are several descriptions of the experiment. See, for example, Homans 1969, Pugh, Hickson and Hinings 1970)

The results of the 'Hawthorne Experiment' suggested that the changes that had been 'experimentally imposed' could not provide a satisfactory explanation for continually

increased production. Mayo argued that work satisfaction is dependent on the informal social pattern of the work group. The increased productivity stemmed from the increase in work satisfaction experienced by the operatives and the increase in satisfaction was due to greater freedom in their working environment and control over their own pace-setting.

Pugh, Hickson and Hinings provide this summary:-

‘by removing the girls from the normal setting of work and by intensifying their interaction and co-operation, informal practices, values, norms and social relationships had been built up giving the group high cohesion. Also, the communication system between the researchers and workers was extremely effective; this meant that the norms of output were those that the girls felt the researchers desired. The result was that the workers and the supervisors developed a sense of participation and as a result established a completely new working pattern’ (1970:128).

One crucial result of Mayo’s work was an increased emphasis on ‘informal’ as well as on ‘formal’ organization.

Theories of motivation have had a large influence on the development of personnel management literature. Maslow’s ‘hierarchy of human needs’ is the most popular reference point. Maslow (1943) argues that there are five sets of goals or ‘basic needs’:- physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. These are arranged in a ‘hierarchy of prepotency’ as humans are conceptualized as ‘perpetually wanting’ animals. There have been several attempts to improve on Maslow’s theory. For example, Graham (1989) notes Alderfer’s ‘ERG’ theory which proposes three levels of need - existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth needs - and Vroom’s alternative explanation in terms of ‘expectancy theory’. These motivation theories suggest that when lower order needs are satisfied the higher needs become more important, but if one level is not sufficiently satisfied then the level below becomes more important.

McGregor’s (1960) analysis of the ‘human side of enterprise’ has been a major influence on how the relationship between managers and their workforces is described in the personnel literature. McGregor starts from a critique of the inadequacies of past conceptualizations of the nature of humans and the belief that additional creative human

energy could become available within organizations. McGregor argues that the conditions imposed by conventional organization theory and scientific management have meant that capabilities have not been realized, that the acceptance of responsibility has been discouraged in favour of passivity, and that 'meaning' has been eliminated from work.

McGregor draws from Maslow to demonstrate why the conventional approach and the philosophy of management by direction and control that it leads to - that is, theory X - is inadequate. He offers a new perspective - theory Y - that relies on self-control and self direction. He suggests that there are several innovative ideas that are consistent with Theory Y, such as decentralization and delegation, job enlargement, participation and consultative management, and performance appraisal.

The 'quality of working life' (QWL) movement developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Buchanan (1992) identifies the four main techniques as job rotation, job enlargement, job enrichment, and composite autonomous group working (1992:139). As Buchanan argues, 'the number of published accounts of these techniques...probably exceeded the number of practical applications' (1992:139). QWL is often mentioned (see for example Walton 1985a, Skinner 1981) but is not examined in depth in the prescriptive HRM literature. On some occasions it is used as a 'catch-all' phrase to refer to techniques based on the human relations/Maslow/McGregor approaches.

The human relations approach, motivational models, and the QWL approach influenced the development of personnel management. Torrington provides a summary of the main stages in the development of the personnel function in terms of the 'social reformer', the 'acolyte of benevolence', the 'humane bureaucrat', the 'consensus negotiator', 'organizational man' and 'manpower analyst' (1989:57-60). He argues that 'all are still present to a varying degree in different types of personnel post and the nature of personnel work today can only be understood by an appreciation of its varied components' (1989:59). There is no authoritative definition of personnel management or what constitutes

its varied components but it can be understood in terms of models or traditions. For example, Tyson (1987) identifies three models - the 'clerk of the works' model (administrative support, recruitment, record keeping and welfare), the 'contracts manager' model, (short-term planning, trade union agreements, and day to day issues), and the 'architect' model, involved with 'creating and building the organization as a whole and implementing specific policies which contribute to the success of the corporate plan' (1987:526). Similarly, Sisson (1989) identifies four traditions in personnel management. The first is the 'welfare' tradition that grew out of the Quaker companies and the founding, in 1913, of the Industrial Welfare Society (the forerunner of the Institute of Personnel Management). The second is the 'manpower control' tradition, that emphasised the need for policies for management-employee relations in the light of the growth of the large, bureaucratic organizations in the first half of this century. The third is the post-war, 'professional' tradition emphasising the importance of specialist knowledge, which grew with the 'quest for status' among personnel managers, and with the membership restrictions utilized by the IPM as it became a 'qualifying' association. The fourth is the IR tradition which grew during the 'sixties and 'seventies along with the increasing importance of workplace bargaining (1989:18).

The relationship between personnel and HRM is one of the issues debated in the 'critical' HRM literature which is examined below. However, even if HRM represents a complete break from previous approaches, the 'traditions' or 'models' of personnel provided the context in which HRM developed, or into which HRM was introduced, with increasing influence during the 1980s.

Human Resource Management

This section focuses on the 'new' prescriptive HRM texts. In this literature, 'strategy' is presented as essential to the effective management of human resources, and effective HRM is presented as an essential part of organizational strategy. Whereas the

‘critical’ HRM literature (discussed in the next section) is mainly a product of British authors, the prescriptive HRM literature is largely American.

Tichy *et al* (1982) argue that:

‘the long run competitiveness of American industry will require considerably more sophisticated approaches to the human resource input that deal with its strategic role in organizational performance’ (1982:47).

They focus on the strategic role of HRM in the formulation and implementation of long run plans and they argue that the tools and concepts of strategic HRM are ‘fundamentally different’ from those of traditional personnel administration; HRM is described as a strategic tool for achieving corporate objectives. Their emphasis is on the strategic rather than the operational level and they provide a framework for conceptualizing HRM along with the linkages to the general strategic management process, from which they claim HRM has been missing. The strategy process is defined in terms of mission and objectives and the utilization of resources to meet objectives. After Chandler, structure follows strategy, but Tichy *et al* include HRM in the implementation process. Thus, HRM is presented as an integral part of the ‘strategic arena’ in organizations.

They argue that different strategies require different structures, and Human Resource Management must suit a particular strategy. They argue that three elements are necessary for firms to function effectively:

- 1. Mission and Strategy** The organization has to have a reason for being, a means for using money, material, information, and people to carry out the mission;
- 2. Organizational Structure** People are organized to carry out the mission of the organization and do the necessary tasks;
- 3. Human Resource Management** People are recruited into the organization to do the jobs defined by the division of labour. Performance must be monitored, and rewards must be given to keep individuals productive (1982:47)

These elements are interrelated rather than hierarchical: strategy, structure, and HRM systems fit together. Tichy *et al* argue that:

‘the fundamental strategic management problem is how to keep the strategy, structure, and human resource management dimensions of the organization in direct alignment’ (1982:48).

They locate these elements in a work environment that consists of economic, political and cultural forces. Tichy *et al* suggest that the human resource cycle consists of four generic processes - selection, appraisal, rewards and development. Performance is seen as the dependent variable which is a function of all the human resource components and a function of the organizational context. The generic processes are described in terms of 'strategic concerns'. For example, in the case of selection the salient strategic concerns are:

devising an organization-wide selection and promotion system that supports the organization's business strategy;

creating internal flows of people that match the business strategy; and,

matching key executives to the business strategy (1982:51).

For Beer *et al* 'HRM involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and employees - its human resources' (1985:1). They locate the development of HRM in the context of the growth in the size and complexity of corporations, legislation, the 'failure' of other approaches, environmental change (increased competition, slower growth), and changes in the workforce (demography, education, the concern about career and life satisfaction, and values - particularly relative to authority). They argue that HRM approaches and activities (which include personnel, labour relations, OD, and equal opportunities) are reactive, disunified, and have often emerged 'lacking a coherent structure or central purpose imprinted by general managers' (1985:3).

They offer their approach as a 'general managers perspective' on HRM because 'without a central philosophy or a strategic view - which can be provided only by general managers - HRM is likely to remain a set of independent activities, each guided by its own practice tradition' (1985:4).

Beer *et al* identify four major policy areas - employee influence, human resource flow, reward systems, and work systems - and examine these from seven HRM perspectives. These perspectives are, first, stakeholder interests and the integration of those

interests. Second, in terms of the design of mechanisms of employee influence. Third, from the perspective of consistency or *fit* between the four major policy areas. Fourth, taking human resources as *social capital*. Fifth, in the context of the location of internal HRM strategy in relation to external competitive strategy. Sixth, in terms of multiple levels of social evaluation of outcomes and, seventh, HRM as part of the general management function. This last perspective is derived from the others:

‘If HRM strategy must fit the competitive strategy, if HRD involves investment decisions with long term implications, and if employees are viewed as one of the groups of major stakeholders of the enterprise whose interests must be balanced by top management, then surely HRM policy decisions cannot be delegated to a functional speciality’ (1985:13-14).

They identify seven groups of factors that need to be considered when making HRM choices:- laws and societal values, task technology, unions, work force characteristics, labour market conditions, business strategy, and management philosophy.

In addition, they propose four criteria by which the impact of HRM choices may be considered and evaluated:- the overall *competence* of employees, the *commitment* of employees, the degree of *congruence* between the goals of employees and those of the organization, and the overall *cost effectiveness* of HRM practices. They note the problems of measurement and assessment and argue that in the final analysis:

‘assessment of HRM outcomes is a matter of judgement informed by data from a variety of sources and in a variety of forms (qualitative and quantitative) and evaluated by various stakeholders. A process of outcome assessment must, therefore, bring together a variety of stakeholders (employee groups, management and unions, for example) to discuss the data and to reach a consensus on its meaning’ (1985:22).

We should note one important point about *cost effectiveness*. They argue that short term measures, such as last quarter’s profits or last year’s return on equity, are relatively unaffected by HRM policies. Therefore, HRM policy must incorporate a long-term perspective (1985:17). They propose that long-term consequences are evaluated in terms of costs and benefits at three levels: the individual, the organization, and society.

Walton expands on the theme of 'stakeholders'. He argues for a commitment strategy that 'acknowledges the legitimate claims of a company's multiple stakeholders - owners, employees, customers and the public' (1985a:80). His argument is in terms of mutuality:

'The new HRM model is composed of policies that promote mutuality - mutual goals, mutual influence, mutual respect, mutual rewards, mutual responsibility. The theory is that policies of mutuality will elicit commitment, which in turn will yield both better economic performance and greater human development' (1985b, quoted in Guest 1995).

Walton contrasts the traditional 'control' strategy with the 'commitment' strategy and provides examples of the possible components of such a strategy. It should be noted that these examples show that Walton's conceptualization of 'commitment' is to be achieved largely through policies that promote a flexible and adaptive organization of work:

- promoting Quality of Work-Life (QWL) and employee involvement (EI) schemes,
- the removal of levels of plant hierarchy, with management hierarchies relatively flat, differences in status minimized, and managers' span of control increased,
- integration of quality and production activities at lower organizational levels,
- combination of production and maintenance operations, opening new career possibilities for workers,
- the broadening of job design, combining planning and implementation and efforts to upgrade operations,
- making teams, not individuals, the organizational units accountable for performance and making performance expectations 'stretch objectives' to emphasize continuous improvement,
- adjust compensation policies to reflect the heightened importance of group achievement, the expanded scope of individual contribution, and the growing concern for such questions of "equity" as gain sharing, stock ownership and profit sharing (1985a:79).

Walton claims that, while such policies may have been more applicable to companies using continuous process technologies, increasing numbers of mass producers have been trying to 'reconceive' the structure of work along these lines (1985a:80).

Skinner (1981) argued that 'human resources strategic planning is as yet a largely unknown art' (1981:113). However, he offers four initial steps managers could begin with:

- '...identify the implicit tendencies of present personnel policies and practices in terms of the skills, attitudes and behaviour they develop;
- ...identify by function, department, and division the desired behavioral characteristics of each employee group;

...develop an HR strategy that details by division, department or function the human resources and specific policies and practices needed;

...make the HR strategy a central part of annual plans, budgets and long-range strategy' (1981:113-114).

Skinner suggests that HR planning 'can act as a catalyst and an operating mechanism to accelerate the building of an effective work force. Where this is accomplished, people are energised and committed and become the most powerful, fundamental corporate competitive resource of all' (1981:114).

In addition, Skinner argues that there are contradictory schools of thought about the management of the work force - identified as human relations, labour relations, personnel management, and industrial engineering. While he does not argue the merits of these 'competing' schools, he suggests that what is needed is a 'comprehensive unifying concept...[and]...a general manager who can effectively mix and match these necessary ingredients' (1981:109).

Skinner argues that the short time horizons of employees can conflict with the long-range goals of the corporation and that 'drawing connections between these sets of goals is not easy'. He suggests that 'effective relations between individuals and companies rest on employees' trust that the goals are connected' (1981:108). The problems of selecting and gaining commitment from the workforce necessitate an HRM strategy for planning, recruitment, development and commitment (1981:114).

Hendry and Pettigrew (1986) argue that there are at least four meanings in the way the term 'strategy' is used that have relevance for HRM - the use of planning, a coherent approach to the design and management of personnel systems based on an employment policy and manpower strategy underpinned by a "philosophy", matching HRM activities and policies to some explicit business strategy, and seeing the people of the organization as a 'strategic resource' for achieving 'competitive advantage' (1986:4).

Hendry and Pettigrew suggest the problem with prescribing personnel strategies is 'that personnel systems are responsive to much wider considerations than formally

conceived business strategies...that both business and HRM are responsive to a variety of contextual factors which through history become embedded in the culture of the firm' (1986:7).

Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall (1988) follow Dyer's suggestion of two dichotomies - separating organizational level from functional level human resource concerns, and differentiating content issues (policies and practices in strategic HRM) from process elements (the means by which policies and practices are derived and implemented). From a critique of the literature (from the areas of HR valuation, HR planning, responses to environmental change, and matching HR to strategic or organizational conditions) they argue that the most successful approach is to 'systematically and reciprocally consider human resource and competitive strategy'. They claim that firms following such an approach will outperform firms that use competitive strategy to solve HR issues, or those that use HR management to solve competitive strategy issues.

From the literature, Baird and Meshoulam (1988) identify six strategic components of HRM which must fit each other - management awareness, management of the function, portfolio of programmes, personnel skills, information technology, and awareness of the environment. They argue that there must be external fit (fitting structure, systems and management to the organization's stage of development, in terms of five stages of growth) as well as internal fit. They argue that HRM has five developmental stages and six strategic responses.

Baird and Meshoulam identify five stages of growth: initiation, functional growth, controlled growth, functional integration, and strategic integration. They claim that HRM must progress sequentially through the stages as the firm moves through the sequence, and that HRM activities are at their most effective when their stage of development matches that of the firm. They argue that, to be effective, the 'six strategic components' should stay in

alignment with each other and with the stage of growth, although if one component is at a higher stage it may lead the others.

Miller argues that the management of human resources is 'vital to the implementation of strategy' (1987:360). Miller suggests that 'strategy' is a 'stratified concept...found at different levels in the organization'. Strategic HRM would be found at the level of 'functional' or 'business' strategy and would be linked to and dependent upon the corporate strategy.

He goes on to argue that 'HRM cannot be conceptualized as a stand-alone corporate issue. Strategically speaking it must flow from and be dependent upon the organization's (market oriented) corporate strategy' (1987:348).

In order to define strategic HRM he compares it with non-strategic IR management and argues that strategic HRM is:

'those decisions and actions which concern the management of employees at all levels in the business and which are related to the implementation of strategies directed towards creating and sustaining competitive advantage' (1987:352)

Miller also argues that 'in addition to the components of HRM policies and practices, we must be interested also in the organization's corporate strategy (upon which those policies are or should be dependent) and the linkages between them' (1987:353).

These, mainly American, texts had considerable impact in Britain. In the late 1980s and early 1990s two British journals with the words 'human resource management' in their titles were founded (Sisson 1990, Poole 1990) and several edited collections examining HRM from a mainly British perspective were published (Storey 1989, Blyton and Turnbull 1992, Salaman 1992, Storey 1995).

The 'critical' HRM literature

This second set of HRM literature is called 'critical' after the title of the article by Legge (1989) and the title of the second collection of articles edited by Storey (1995). This set of literature follows a rational analytical course: the key issues concern what HRM is

(including what the component parts are, whether HRM represents a departure from the 'orthodoxy' of personnel management, etc.), whether HRM is coherent, and whether HRM is 'rhetoric' or exists in 'reality'.

These issues are important to the study of the management of people in work organizations both because of the volume of writing that has been produced since 'seemingly fully formed, HRM made its appearance in Britain in the mid-1980s' (Keenoy 1990b:363) and, more importantly, because the HRM concept appears to offer the promise of a general theory of employee management and/or a 'set of alternatives to what might be described as the "Donovan" model' (Storey 1989:8). This literature identifies, from the prescriptive texts, the centrality of notions of 'strategy' and it directly addresses the significance of concepts of 'strategy' to HRM.

What is HRM?

Storey argues, from the prescriptive literature, that 'the attribute which perhaps excites most interest is that which allegedly locates HRM policy formulations firmly at the strategic level'. He argues that a characteristic of HRM lies in its 'internally coherent approach' in that there is a 'suggested alignment between each of the main "people-management" interventions' in four 'key constitutive elements' of selection, appraisal, rewards, and development (1989:6).

Storey notes the 'elasticity' in the meaning of HRM and identifies a 'restricted' usage of the term - as a label only for the approach that treats labour as a valued asset rather than a variable cost - and an 'extended' usage to refer to 'a whole array of managerial initiatives'. More influentially, he distinguishes between a 'hard' and a 'soft' version of HRM:

'The hard one emphasises the quantitative, calculative and business-strategic aspects of managing the headcounts resource in as "rational" a way as for any other economic factor. By contrast, the "soft" version traces its roots to the human relations school; it emphasises communication, motivation, and leadership' (1989:8)

Storey argues that it is possible to place the 'hard' version within the 'strategic' while the lower-level operational presents the 'soft' version to employees. Explicit definitions of HRM are rare but Storey does provide one:

'Human resource management is a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques' (1995:5).

He suggests that HRM is an amalgam of description, prescription, and logical deduction. It describes the beliefs and assumptions of certain leading-edge practitioners, prescribes certain priorities, and deduces certain actions which follow from the propositions (1995:5).

Guest (1989a) argues that any attempt to use the term HRM to revitalize the jaded image of personnel management is unlikely to be of any use operationally or conceptually unless it contains a set of specific policy goals. He considers the strategic implications of the term to be no different from the strategic implications of personnel management, but sees the input to the strategic concern in terms of the *view* of the strategic direction that should be pursued, as a distinctive feature of HRM.

Guest identifies the key HRM policy goals as high commitment, high quality, flexibility and strategic integration and identifies the novelty of HRM either in the claim that it is the source of competitive advantage, or in the presentation of a particular solution. He argues that, if business strategy is taken as the initial building block around which policy should be integrated, then there should be a choice of strategies to provide best 'fit':

'Only when a coherent HRM strategy, directed towards these four HRM policy goals, fully integrated into business strategy and fully supported by line management at all levels is applied will the high productivity and related outcomes sought by industry be achieved. Such a strategy is only likely to exist where the "cement" is in place in the form of supportive leadership from the top, reflected in the organization's culture and backed by an explicit strategy to utilize human resources' (1990).

Guest (1991) argues that the key task is to differentiate HRM from personnel:

‘The risk of overstating change, and therefore the need to analyse and understand what change has occurred, is precisely why the concept of an orthodoxy is useful. It provides a yardstick against which to measure practice. It is for this reason that we need to analyse and operationalize HRM and distinguish it from traditional personnel management’ (1991:151).

Legge (1989) starts by examining normative models of personnel management and HRM. She follows Guest (1987) in arguing that descriptive models may lead to the risk of ‘accepting as HRM any practices so labelled’ (Legge 1989:20). In comparing and contrasting British and American normative definitions of personnel she argues that some common themes emerge including selecting, rewarding, developing, directing employees so that they achieve satisfaction and give their best - enabling the firm to achieve its goals. An additional common theme is that personnel is seen as the task of all managers, not just of personnel specialists. The differences between American and British definitions concern the American assumption of a unitary frame of reference and the British pluralist perspective (1989:22).

From a comparison of American and British normative models of HRM, Legge draws out several common themes:

‘that human resource policies should be integrated with strategic business planning and used to reinforce an appropriate (or change an inappropriate) organizational culture, that human resources are valuable and a source of competitive advantage, that they may be tapped most efficiently by mutually consistent policies that promote commitment and which, as a consequence, foster a willingness in employees to act flexibly in the interests of the “adaptive organization’s pursuit of excellence”’ (1989:25).

In comparing normative models of personnel management and HRM, Legge identifies four similarities. Both models:

‘...emphasize the importance of integrating personnel/HRM practices with organizational goals...

...vest personnel/HRM firmly in line management.

...emphasise the importance of individuals fully developing their abilities for their own personal satisfaction and to make their “best contribution” to organizational success...

...identify placing the “right” people into the “right” jobs as an important means of integrating personnel/HRM practice with organizational goals, including individual development’ (1989:26-27).

When comparing normative personnel and HRM models she argues that the general differences are ‘largely of emphasis and meaning rather than substance’ (1989:27) but that there are ‘significant differences in focus’ (1989:39). She goes on to argue that these differences in emphasis/focus ‘all point to HRM, in theory, being essentially a more central strategic management task than personnel management’ (1989:28, 1995b:75). Legge (1995) extends the analysis to consider the ‘descriptive-functional’ and the ‘critical-evaluative’ models in addition to the normative model. A similar approach can be found in Noon (1992) where HRM is discussed in terms of being a map, model, or theory.

In a review of the US HRM literature Beaumont argues that ‘the leading, single theme which is held to differentiate HRM from its predecessor, personnel administration, is a broadening or widening notion; the leading advocates of HRM...see it essentially as an organization-wide “philosophy” which is much broader, more long-run orientated and less problem centred than personnel administration’ (1992:21-22).

From Mahoney and Deckop (1986), Beaumont identifies specific departures from personnel administration by the HRM literature in such areas as employment planning, negotiating and administering collective agreements, job satisfaction and a focus on the notion of ‘organizational culture’, teamworking and performance, cost reductions and positive contributions to organizational effectiveness, and the development of the full, longer-term employment potential of employees (1992:21). Beaumont identifies corporate culture and the linking of business planning and competitive strategy with that of HRM planning as two leading, individual themes (1992:27-28).

Torrington argues that the HRM starts, not from the employees but from organizational needs. He argues that while personnel management is supply-driven HRM is demand-driven. He claims that:

‘HRM seeks to eliminate the mediation role and adopts a generally unitarist perspective. It emphasises strategy and planning rather than problem solving and mediation, so that employee cooperation is delivered by programmes of corporate culture, remuneration packaging, team building and management development for core employees, while peripheral employees are kept at arms’ length’ (1989:60-1).

Torrington argues that ‘*strategic management of human resources...is human asset accounting reinvented and re-presented as a version of human capital theory*’ (1989:56).

Purcell argues that choices in HR structures and approaches ‘are themselves strategic since they establish the basic parameters of employee relations management within the firm’ (1989:71). Purcell develops an idealized, normative model involving three levels of strategic decision making. In the model:

‘strategy in HRM is determined in the context of first-order, long-run decisions on the direction and scope of the firms’ activities and purpose (location, technology, skill requirements, etc.) and second-order decisions on the structure of the firm seen in its internal operating procedures (levels of authority, control systems, profit centres, etc.)’ (1989:71).

While the third-order strategic choices in HRM are influenced by first- and second-order decisions and by environmental factors (law, trade unions, external labour markets) ‘what actually happens in employee relations will be determined by decisions at all three levels and by the willingness and ability of local management to do what is intended in the context of specific environmental conditions and forces’ (1989:71).

Sisson argues that personnel and HRM can be differentiated on the basis of time-span and focus. Personnel deals with the short term and HRM is concerned with the long term. Personnel is focused on management-trade union relations and HRM on management-employee relations with an emphasis on gaining commitment from individuals (1989:31).

More recently, Guest (1996) has argued that there are three broad categories of general level theory about HRM - the strategic, the generic and the normative. The strategic theories focus on external fit, are weak on process, and imply a limited conceptualization of ‘performance’ in financial terms. The generic theories (e.g. Beer *et al* 1985) are seen in terms of an essentially descriptive ‘open systems’ approach with a focus on employee

relations. The normative theories focus on internal fit in terms of advocating the use of unchanging 'bundles', lists, or sets of practices. Purcell (1996) also focuses on 'bundles' of HR practices which imply one universally applicable 'recipe' of HR activity. He sees 'strategy' as 'at the heart of the best fit/best practice debate' (1996:8).

The coherence of HRM

Although Storey (1989) identifies coherence as a characteristic of HRM, Legge identifies a number of potential contradictions associated with the HRM model. She argues that:

'Leaving aside potential contradictions between the integration of HRM policy with business strategy and the ability to achieve an integrated company-wide HRM policy; between policy matched to business strategy and the "soft" HRM model, indeed between the "hard" and "soft" versions of the model itself, contradictions may be found in the goals of commitment, flexibility and quality, and of "strong" culture sought by the "soft" version of the model' (1989:34).

Legge argues that the contradictions and tensions in the HRM models 'call into question whether its enactment will realize its aspirations' (1989:39). She questions whether the contradictions in the model can be reconciled without stretching to the limit 'the meaning of HRM as a distinct approach' (1995).

Keenoy, while recognizing that 'confused academics' seek to 'impose order and coherence on managerial social practice', similarly argues that there are 'incompatible dualistic imperatives':

'Employees are encouraged to compete with each other through the use of individual contracts, performance related pay and individual performance appraisal and to take individual responsibility for budgets while at the same time being expected to become team players through quality circles, team briefing and communication cascades. The imperatives of marginal costs must co-exist with the insistence on quality and customer care. Managers are exhorted to minimise unit and variable costs while at the same time being expected to develop and create loyalty and commitment from their valued human resources. The confused rhetorical grasp of HRM seems unreflectively to endorse such managerial "motivation-control" dilemmas as solutions' (1990b:379).

Keenoy argues that HRM 'is best regarded as a patchwork-quilt concept stitched together from the diverse currents of change which presently impinge upon the management

of the employment relationship' (1990a:4). In this conceptualization there is a 'constant tension' between the hard and soft versions of HRM (1990a:2). He argues that:

'in embracing the very real power offered by involvement in strategic HRM, personnel managers may have to relinquish any claims to be the guardians of humane human resource management' (1990a:9).

The comparison of HRM 'rhetoric' with 'reality'

The comparison of HRM 'rhetoric' with 'reality' is the key issue in both collections edited by Storey (1989, 1995). Many of the contributions seem to suggest that there is little evidence of strategic HRM in Britain. For example, Storey and Sisson (1989) suggest that:

'the overriding impression to be gained from studying what is happening (as opposed to what should be happening) is that, despite the powerful advocacy of the "excellence" literature - supported massively by the government and its agencies - there is little evidence of a strategic approach to HRM being adopted in most organizations' (1989:172).

Storey, introducing the 1995 collection, continued the theme:

'This is not a textbook which peddles abstract models and techniques which find no reflection in the real world. Indeed, the general stance is critical of the rhetoric of so many of the utterances on HRM which simply fly in the face of everyday employment practice' (1995:xi).

He identifies, as a common thread running through the 1995 collection, 'the gap between the broad trends in employment practices and the high principles of the model' (1995:26).

Typical of this approach is Sisson who argues that 'remarkable as it might seem, HRM seems to have had little or no impact on the personnel function in the UK in the decade or so in which the thinking associated with it has been so pervasive' (1995:105).

Similarly, in introducing another edited collection, Blyton and Turnbull suggest that:

'the vocabulary of HRM has surpassed both its conceptual and empirical foundations - the rhetoric has outstripped the reality' (1992:vii).

Where HRM is found, it is usually in isolated examples. For example, Armstrong argues that 'Strategic human resource management certainly exists, but it tends to be confined to companies which have a core activity for which the development of an

appropriate workforce and management is a critical function for the company. This argues against the possibility of its generalization to more diversified companies' (1995:158).

There are several attempts to explain the 'gap' between rhetoric and reality. Purcell argues that 'current trends in corporate strategy in many large diversified companies render the ideals of HRM...unobtainable' (1989:90), and that 'the material conditions for these [ideas] to be translated into long-run strategic decisions placing HRM as the, or even a, critical function in corporate strategy, do not exist' (1989:90).

Purcell and Ahlstrand suggest that it is the shift towards the adoption of financial control systems that makes the adoption of HRM more difficult (1989:413). Similarly, Armstrong suggests that the personnel function now 'operates within a managerial culture which is increasingly dominated by the language and structures of management accountancy' (1989:166).

Guest identifies the 'problem' of HRM as being the implementation (1989a:55). The formulation process appeared to be strategic in the long-term rational planning sense, but there were few, if any, examples of the strategy being carried out in practice. However, in a later article, he does find 'strong support for the view that those organizations that use high performance HRM practices report higher performance' in (mainly North American) empirical studies (1996:13), although he suggests that this finding is 'skeletal' (1996:15). In contrast, Purcell finds that empirical testing of best fit 'bundles' of HRM practices is 'disappointing' (1996:8). He argues that 'the claim that the bundle of best practice HRM is universally applicable leads us into a utopian cul-de-sac' (1996:13).

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has located the development of prescriptive HRM in the context of the use of concepts of 'strategy' in general management texts, the growing influence of the 'excellence' literature, and the conceptualization of personnel management in terms of different 'strands' (Farnham and Pimlott 1979) and 'models' (human relations, motivation,

QWL). While 'strategy' was seen as an issue within the scope of personnel management (Legge 1978), the development of HRM in the 1980s led to 'strategic integration' being identified by the 'critical' HRM literature as the key feature.

The conceptualization of strategic HRM is challenged in the 'critical' literature by empirical evidence that new management initiatives are mostly unconnected and *ad hoc*. From this perspective, as Blyton and Turnbull argue, 'HRM is more appropriately viewed as an umbrella term for a series of practices that have come to prominence during the past decade' (1992:viii). They argue that HRM is a *response* to issues of management-worker relations rather than an explanation of them (1992:viii). From the perspective of the 'critical' literature, then, policies for managing people in work organizations in Britain are a largely unconnected and *ad hoc* set of practices which are not strategically integrated. HRM is seen in terms of 'rhetoric' that is not matched in 'reality'. Empirical work on the use of strategies has failed to find supporting evidence for the theoretical concept and the evidence seems to suggest that the variation and unevenness is greater than can be accounted for by the contingencies of different industrial sectors: such empirical research suggests an enterprise-by-enterprise approach.

The consequence of this conclusion is that the 'critical' analysis of HRM is directed towards the study of individual and discrete *ad hoc* management policies drawn together under the label 'HRM' that functions as an 'umbrella term'. From this perspective there is nothing distinctive or academically interesting about HRM itself: it does not function as a 'general theory of employee management'. This conclusion sets a research agenda which conceptualizes management action as individual and *ad hoc*: subsequent research is then focused on disparate and discrete *ad hoc* management initiatives which reinforces this conclusion.

It is difficult to see how the approach informed by the 'critical' literature might progress beyond the investigation of initiatives conceptualized as unconnected. If HRM

cannot be reconceptualized the 'critical' literature will be unable to regard HRM as anything more than an 'umbrella term' for a number of disparate, discrete, *ad hoc* policies and practices. This is not to argue that HRM should be discarded. As Brewster argues:

'Any attempt to deny the reality or integrity of the HRM concept is probably doomed to failure. The terminology is too widely entrenched, in practitioner and in academic circles, for it to "go away"' (1995:328).

However, for a 'critical' approach to successfully provide an analysis of HRM with the conceptualization described in the literature review, it must 'theorize' HRM. As Guest argues:

'Without a theory of human resource management, we are thrown back either on the studies of excellent companies or on case studies of companies that claim to practice human resource management' (1987:507).

This is also true for 'strategy'. However, rather than articulate a 'theory of HRM' or a 'theory of strategy' within the 'critical' perspective, the next two chapters (Two and Three) examine an alternative perspective within which, it is argued, 'strategy' and 'HRM' can be reconceptualized to provide a new way of understanding their significance to the management of people in work organizations. It is argued that their significance lies in their contribution to the establishment of connections between disparate managerial practices and in the establishment of causal relationships between the environment, the organization, and the individual. Chapter Four returns to an examination of the 'critical' literature and argues that the problems identified by the 'critical' literature are a product of a 'positivist' approach towards strategic HRM.

CHAPTER TWO - DISCOURSE AND THE APPLICATION OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This chapter describes and examines an alternative approach within which 'strategy' and 'HRM' can be reconceptualized to provide a new way of understanding their significance to the management of people in work organizations. This alternative approach is derived from a Foucauldian conceptualization of 'discourse'.

In this chapter Foucault's concept of 'discourse' is described and some Foucauldian-inspired studies - which focus on power, knowledge, surveillance, and the constitution of subjectivity - are examined. The implications for the way that 'strategy', 'HRM', expertise, and rationality are conceptualized are discussed. From the literature three key 'objects' of discourse (environment, organization, and individuals) are identified. The last section argues that these three key objects are 'discursively' constructed and then ordered and aligned in causal relationships in discourse. It is argued that, whilst two distinct and apparently contradictory orderings ('repertoires') can be identified in the prescriptive literature, these orderings are complementary within the 'rationality' or 'internal logic' of managerial discourse.

This chapter will provide the basis of an analysis of prescriptive management literature as discourse in Chapter Three and it also provides a framework that is utilized in Part II for an examination and analysis of interviews with managers.

Discourse

Before addressing what is understood by the term 'discourse' in a Foucauldian analysis, it is worth noting that there are similarities with other concepts, in particular:

ideology,

the language 'grid' hypothesised by Sapir and Whorf (see Trudgill 1974),

'social constructionism' (Berger and Luckman 1966) which was used by Storey but rejected for its failure to 'confront the problem of power' (1983:42), and,

the 'paradigms' of scientific inquiry as described by Kuhn (1962).

Defining Foucault's use of the term 'discourse' is difficult because he used it in what amounts to a negative way in that he used it to distance his analysis from other approaches.

As Cousins and Hussain argue:

'His use of the term discourse may be taken to be tactical. It may be thought of as an attempt to avoid treating knowledge in terms of "ideas". The reason for avoiding the term "ideas" is that it brings in its train a series of presuppositions which Foucault hopes to abandon' (1984:78).

Foucault's 'avoidance' is mirrored in the work of other authors where 'discourse' is either not defined at all, is defined but the implications for the study of people at work are not developed, or is defined in a footnote as in Townley (1994:2 note 2) and Legge (1995:297 note 2). However, despite the difficulties of a Foucauldian-inspired version of discourse, the approach is worth pursuing because it brings a new language (itself a discourse) which provides new insights into the ways HRM can be conceptualized.

The first step is to distance the concept of discourse from linguistics. Easthope argues that:

'Linguistics, the science which takes language as its object, can show how an utterance takes its place in the system of language at levels up to and including the sentence. It cannot show how and why one sentence connects with another into a cohesive whole: this is a matter of discourse' (1983:8).

Discourse can be defined broadly: Potter and Wetherell are inspired by Foucault but use the term discourse in its most 'open' sense, drawing a conceptualization from Gilbert and Mulkay which covers 'all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds' (1987:7). This definition is most appropriate for studying small scale interactions. While not disputing the validity of this conceptualization, the focus in this thesis is not on interaction, but on how the management of people in work organizations is understood and presented. The conceptualization used in this context is that a 'discourse' is a group of statements which provide the language and the knowledge for talking about a particular subject in a 'discursive formation'. Such language and knowledge in discourse limits the possible alternative ways in which that subject can be constructed (Hall 1992:291-

2). A similar definition of discourse is provided by Watson who argues that it is '*a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue*' (1994b:113). Miller and Rose argue for a view of discourse:

'as a technology of thought, requiring attention to the particular technical devices of writing, listing, numbering, and computing that render a realm into discourse as a knowable, calculable and administrable object. "Knowing" an object in such a way that it can be governed is more than a purely speculative activity: it requires the invention of procedures of notation, ways of collecting and presenting statistics, the transportation of these to centres where calculations and judgements can be made and so forth' (1990:5).

Clearly this approach to discourse assumes that there is more to discourse than just communication. Easthope argues that the conventional approach to discourse places too much emphasis on 'communication' which is generalised and 'made into a definition of discourse as a whole' (1983:10) rather than conceived as 'a "secondary", dependent and special effect of discourse' (1983:32). In particular, he argues against the conventional notion that language is 'transparent' (1983:11) in that words do not 'carry' meaning in a neutral manner. The implication of this approach is that "'ideas" take on meaning according to the discursive context or historical context within which they are taken up' (1988:xii-xiii). That is, 'ideas' are given meaning by actors, but the act of giving meaning is influenced by the specific, historical conditions in which that act is performed. Similarly, Miller and Rose argue that language as an 'intellectual technology' provides 'a mechanism for rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of action' (1990:7): 'information' and 'knowledge' become key sources of power. Miller and Rose argue that:

'Information...is not the outcome of a neutral recording function. It is itself a way of acting upon the real, a way of devising techniques for inscribing it...in such a way as to make the domain in question susceptible to evaluation, calculation and intervention' (1990:7).

'Knowledge' in the Foucauldian sense is understood as:

'a way of constructing the world, of differentiating it into various elements and through this process taking control over the elements and disciplining the self and social institutions' (Morgan 1992:151).

In this way 'knowledge' is linked to power: as Lukes argues, power is exercised by shaping perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that people 'accept their role in the existing order of things' (1974:24). Foucault's perspective on power focuses on 'the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was' (1988:104). Foucault argues that 'Power in the substantive sense, '*le*' *pouvoir*, doesn't exist...power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations' (1980:198).

The most important claim of this approach is that language orders perception through the operation of 'discursive practices' - the 'rules' of which, according to Foucault, define 'the ordering of objects' (1972:49). To understand the unity of a discourse Foucault argued that:

'Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements,...a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations) we will say for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*' (1972:38).

For Foucault, discourse 'finds a way of limiting its domain, of defining what it is talking about, of giving it the status of an object - and therefore making it manifest, nameable, and describable' (1972:41). A discourse becomes 'the major authority in society' that delimits, designates, names and establishes objects of discourse. It also divides, contrasts, relates, regroups, and classifies such objects (1972:42).

The unity of a discourse is based 'not so much on the permanence or uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed'. The unity is based on the 'interplay of rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time: objects that are shaped by the measures of discrimination and repression, objects that are differentiated in daily practice' (1972:32-33).

Foucault also seeks to discover the 'law operating behind diverse statements and the place from which they come' by examining who is speaking and the institutional sites from which discourses are made and from which they derive their 'legitimate source and point of application' (1972:50-51). A subject can occupy, or be given, various sites and positions when making a discourse (1972:54). These subject positions are 'defined by the situation that it is possible for him to occupy in relation to the various domains or groups of objects' (1972:52). For example, a subject of discourse may occupy a position 'as an observing subject with instrumental mediation, as a subject selecting out of the perceptual plurality only the elements of the structure, as a subject transcribing these elements into a coded vocabulary, etc.' (1972:73).

For Foucault, discourse is not 'a place where previously established objects are laid out one after another like words on a page' (1972:42-3) but a set of relations that have 'made possible the formation of a whole group of various objects' (1972:44). He treats discourses not as groups of signs but as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1972:49). Discourse is not, therefore, seen as a 'phenomenon of expression' nor the 'majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject' but as:

'a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined. It is a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is deployed' (1972:55).

Hence, an object is not 'discovered' and is not 'constant'. It does not 'await in limbo the order that will free it'. Rather, 'it exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations' (1972:45). Discursive relations are neither internal nor external to discourse. They are:

'at the limit of discourse; they offer it objects of which it can speak, or rather (for this image of offering presupposes that objects are formed independently of discourse), they determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc. These relations characterize not the language

used by discourse, not the circumstances in which it is deployed, but discourse itself as a practice' (1972:46).

Foucault's aim is, therefore, 'to substitute for the enigmatic treasure of "things" anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse' (1972:47). He claims that he remains at 'the level of discourse itself' (1972:48). He identifies three levels of relations:

'a system of *real* or *primary* relations, a system of *reflexive* or *secondary* relations, and a system of relations that might properly be called *discursive*' (1972:45).

Foucault suggests that archaeology:

'reveals relations between discursive formations and non-discursive domains (institutions, political events, economic practices and processes)...it tries to determine how the rules of formation which govern [a set of enunciative facts]...may be linked to non-discursive systems: it seeks to define specific forms of articulation' (1972:162).

Smart argues that such relations are marginal in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* but are central to Foucault's genealogical analyses (1985:41).

Foucault's emphasis was on power - 'the question at the centre of everything' (1988:101), 'the problem that has to be resolved' (1988:104) - what power is, who exercises it, how is it exercised, what happens when someone exercises power over another (1988:101-3) and, in particular, 'the techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was' (1988:104). For Foucault 'power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations' (1980:198). 'Strategies of power' are important for Foucault because he argues that they actually produce knowledge (1988:106). He argues that 'power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (1977:194). Discourse is a product of power relations but it is a product that contributes to the conditions of its own production. Discourse can be conceptualized as both structure and act.

Foucauldian approaches to the study of the management of people in work organizations

There are two phases in Foucault's work: there is a shift in emphasis between the earlier 'archaeological' phase concerned with discourse and discursive formations and the later 'genealogical' work concerned with the relations between discursive formations and non-discursive domains, such as forms of production, social relationships, and political institutions (Smart 1985, Burrell 1988). Smart argues that the 'archaeological' phase is 'directed to an analysis of the unconscious rules of formation which regulate the emergence of discourses in the human sciences' and the latter reveals 'the emergence of the human sciences, their conditions of existence, to be inextricably associated with particular technologies of power embodied in social practices' (1985:47-48). Smart argues that such a shift in interest, formulation and method does not signify a 'break' between Foucault's earlier and later work and he identifies important continuities, such as the:

'historical analyses of the various modes through which in Western culture human beings have been constituted as subjects and objects of knowledge and an associated concern with the inter-relationships between forms of knowledge and power' (1985:19).

Smart also sees this 'underlying thematic unity' as:

'the analysis of how human beings govern themselves and others by the establishment of "regimes of truth", or of how a particular "regime of rationality" simultaneously constitutes rules and procedures for doing things as well as "true" discourses which legitimate activities through the provision of reasons and principles' (1985:72).

Similarly, Burrell emphasises the continuities between the two methods. He identifies a commitment:

'to a rejection of totalizing visions of history, to an image of discontinuous ruptures in social change, to a concern to decentre the subject and to a questioning of the idea of human progress and enlightenment' (1988:229).

Foucauldian-inspired literature on the management of people in work organizations focuses on two main interrelated themes - (i) power/knowledge, discipline and surveillance, and (ii) power/knowledge and the constitution of subjectivity.

(i) Power/knowledge, discipline and surveillance

Sewell and Wilkinson (1992a, 1992b) follow Foucault in utilizing Jeremy Bentham's concept of a 'Panopticon': that is, Bentham's description of a model prison which comprised of a central observation tower surrounded by a concentric ring of peripheral cells (Foucault 1977).

Sewell and Wilkinson use the concept of the Panopticon to examine the implementation of a JIT/TQM (Just In Time/Total Quality Management) system in an electronics plant and argue that, rather than representing empowerment of workers, 'JIT/TQM regimes both create and demand systems of surveillance which improve on those of the traditional bureaucracy in instilling discipline and thereby consolidating central control and making it more efficient' (1992a:277).

The multi-skilling of workers and the extended domain over which workers have influence in organizations using JIT/TQM means that 'management must erect a superstructure of surveillance and control which enhances visibility and facilitates the direct and immediate scrutiny of both individual and collective action' (1992a:282). Sewell and Wilkinson suggest that the layout of a plant using a JIT/TQM regime - the physical architecture and organization of work flows around products rather than functions - offers a high degree of visibility. They note that visibility is increased by the stripping out of stocks, particularly work-in-progress and buffers between processes, which reduces the opportunities for workers to 'hide' defects or poor quality. The constant monitoring of production and the ability to trace defects found at the final testing stage back to individual operators means that normative sanctions and corrective discipline can be applied.

Therefore, they argue:

'the development and continued refinement of electronic surveillance systems using computer-based technology can provide the means by which management can achieve the benefits that derive from the delegation of responsibility to teams whilst retaining authority and disciplinary control through the ownership of the super structure of surveillance and the information it collects, retains, and disseminates' (1992a:283).

It is the workers' knowledge that their work activity is subject to constant scrutiny, by electronic surveillance and the collective scrutiny of peers in the work teams, which are major factors in the operation of discipline. This means that:

'it is increasingly in the ownership (in its broadest sense) or control of the means of surveillance - the mechanism of *Power/Knowledge* - that enables management to pursue a degree of devolution through the implementation of a JIT/TQM regime whilst still retaining its authority' (1992a:287).

Because the JIT/TQM approach to surveillance lessens the obvious need of supervisory management it is the ownership of the superstructure of surveillance that provides the 'emerging focus for political struggle' (1992a:287). Sewell and Wilkinson go on to argue that the quality system not only indicates the existence of problems but also exerts 'a disciplinary force which operates directly on the subjectivity of individual members' (1992b:108).

(ii) *Power/knowledge and the constitution of subjectivity*

Foucauldian-inspired literature on the constitution of subjectivity at work is more extensive (e.g. Knights 1990, Willmott 1993, Hollway 1991, Townley 1994, Knights and Morgan 1990, 1995, du Gay 1996a) and much of it focuses on the relationship between discipline and subjectivity.

Hollway, for example, argues that Foucault's historical perspective 'understands the production of knowledge by analysing the relations between knowledge, power, and practice' (1991:3). She provides an analysis of whether work psychology has influenced 'the behaviour and self-understanding of individuals at work' (1991:3) and she argues that knowledge concerned with people at work is not objective, but an historical product of interests and power relations in practice. For her 'knowledge' does not exist in isolation from its conditions of production and reproduction (1991:7). Following Foucault, Hollway uses power to mean a productive force which produces knowledge (1991:10-11). She argues that 'knowledge is not produced in a neutral environment and then applied: it is

produced as part of management-employee relations, with the complex of interests and influences which characterize them' (1991:144).

Hollway charts the development of work psychology from scientific management, through the emergence and development of human relations, to concepts of organizational culture. She argues that, although methods have changed and although there have been several strategies of work regulation which coexist and compete as regulative problems change in a variety of workplaces, work psychology has consistently targeted 'the individual' (1991:152-154).

Hollway argues that psychologists have not *discovered* but have *produced* 'the individual'. She claims that there is 'no such thing, except in discourse' (1991:186). She goes on to argue that 'discourses and practices, through power relations and language, produce subjectivity' by influencing management practice through reflecting back the preoccupations of employers and managers in 'systematic, formal, apparently scientific discourses which are tied to developments in the practice of workplace regulation' (1991:187).

One difficulty is apparent in Hollway's account of work psychology. She refers to her previous studies - applied to situations other than work - in which she argues that discourses and practices, through power relations and language, produce subjectivity. Crucially, she can only 'believe' that this is the case also in work relations (1991:187). However, introducing more discipline into an organization does not necessarily lead to a more disciplined organization. As Hollway acknowledges, 'the sum of these positions in discourse does not constitute the entire person' (1991:188). Similarly, Townley quotes Weedon:

Individuals are both the site and subjects of discursive struggle for their identity. Yet the interpellation of individuals as subjects within particular discourses is never final (Weedon 1991, quoted in Townley 1994:12-13).

Townley explicitly provides a Foucauldian analysis of HRM. She argues that three themes run through Foucault's work:

how we understand the unity of a discipline. What constitutes a body of knowledge and demarcates one subject from another?...

the relationship between power and knowledge...

the nature of the individual subject: how do we come to have knowledge of ourselves and how do we conduct our relationships with others? (1994:1).

Townley argues that Foucault's work 'shows how objects of knowledge are not natural, but are ordered or constructed by "discourse" which determines what is the "seeable and the sayable"' (1994:2). This leads her to identify several questions relating to HRM:

How is HRM constructed?

What is the theoretical coherence which has defined or circumscribed the boundaries of HRM?

What is the effect of constructing the subject in a particular way?

To what has our attention been directed and from what has it been averted?

What are the limits of the seeable and the sayable within the discourse of HRM? (1994:2-3)

Townley argues that 'Knowing the individual in a particular way situates them in a possible range of practices and defines the type of intervention which results' (1994:5). She provides chapters on the 'dividing practices' of HRM, on the control of activity, the individual as object (which is similar in approach to Hollway) and the individual as subject (in which she goes beyond Hollway).

She examines three types of HRM techniques which 'constitute the identity' of the individual worker. The first techniques are the 'practices by which individuals try to locate and identify themselves'. For these she focuses on the 'confessing individual' and examines

attitude surveys, selection interviews, and self assessment ². The second group of techniques are 'the practices which are directed at reconstituting the subjectivity of the worker' such as employee development (self-development, competencies, TQM, skills training, outdoor pursuits, etc.) and mentoring (1994:109-126).

The third group of techniques are those practices which 'attempt to construct an identity of the productive subject and thereby establish the individual as an active agent in the productive role' (1994: 109). These include welfare and employee assistance programmes, quality circles, profit-sharing, and employee share ownership schemes.

Grey (1994) argues that 'both workplace surveillance and the production of self-managing subjects may be seen as variants of the Foucauldian theme of self-discipline' (1994:481). From case study material on the careers of accountants he argues that 'within the project of self-management, career has a particular role to play since it is a powerful "technology" in enabling the construction of, precisely, a project' (1994:481).

Discourse and Ideology

Before discussing how this concept of discourse might be operationalized in an analysis of power relations in work organizations it is necessary to examine in greater depth the relationship between discourse and ideology.

'Discourse' and 'ideology' are similar concepts in that they are both used to refer to the means by which we view and understand the world. Du Gay argues that 'discourse' and 'ideology' have become virtually synonymous because:

'recent reformulations of the latter term have helped to deprive it of many of its pejorative overtones - by indicating, for example, that ideologies do not have any necessary class or political affiliation' (1996a:73, note 5).

² See Metcalfe (1992) for an analysis of the CV as confession and as 'one of the available stories for all wage-labourers' (1992:640).

This is part of a wider argument that is beyond the scope of the present project and, for the sake of convenience in the context of the 'critical' literature which relies on a conceptualization of 'reality', the earlier formulation of 'ideology' is used here.

Foucault argued that ideology was 'difficult to make use of' because it 'always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to stand for truth' and because it stands 'relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant' (1980:118). 'Ideology' is often used to refer to a consciousness that is a product of class relations and depends on some form of 'false' consciousness. The idea of 'false' consciousness depends on a particular approach to 'speech act theory' that is referential. In other words, the concept of ideology implies that there is a reality beyond ideology that we have access to, can refer to, and can use as a position of 'objectivity'.

Discourse theory suggests that there is no 'meta-language', no 'transcendental' subjectivity superior to discourse, that can speak of the relationship between discourse and reality. Similarly, there is no 'meta-theory' that allows us to judge between discourses to decide which is closer to the 'truth', and no position of 'objectivity' - only competing interpretations. This, then, is the most important distinction between discourse and ideology. An approach based on 'ideology' makes a distinction between 'science' - that which is an objective and 'true' representation of the world - and 'ideology' - that which is a 'false' construction of the world. In contrast, the discourse approach suggests that all we have are discourses and that those discourses construct the 'facts' by which we judge truth and falsehood. 'Science' is, therefore, simply another competing discourse (which may be, however, more 'powerful' than others). Potter and Wetherell argue that we can 'bracket off the issue of the *quality* of accounts as *accurate* or *inaccurate descriptions* of mental states...[and]...focus exclusively on discourse itself: how it is constructed, its functions, and the consequences which arise from different discursive organization' (1987:178).

Ideology and access to 'reality' are key issues in debates in the 'critical' literature. Keenoy (1990b) suggests that the '*primary purpose*' of the rhetoric of HRM might be to provide a legitimatory managerial ideology. However, in the analysis in the following chapters there is no attempt to judge which of the many accounts is closer to 'the truth' or 'reality'. It is argued that objects and accounts in discourse are constructions but they are not presented as '*false or imaginary*' (see Gordon 1980:239) - although the prescriptive literature, in that it is *prescriptive*, does involve a conscious element of 'fantasy'. However, the major focus is on how claims to 'truth' and 'reality' are constructed.

The application of discourse analysis to HRM

In this section it is argued that a Foucauldian approach is particularly appropriate for an examination of the construction of 'knowledge' in HRM discourse because, while many of the concepts are presented as relatively new, they have been introduced into a mature discursive practice displaying 'unity' and 'regularity'. Smart argues that with a Foucauldian approach:

'it is those forms of knowledge which have passed through the threshold of epistemologization but which have yet to negotiate the threshold of scientificity which have constituted the most accessible and appropriate objects of analysis' (1985:66).

In the next chapter it is argued that the prescriptive management literature represents just such a 'form of knowledge' and is an 'accessible and appropriate' object of analysis. The remainder of this chapter prepares for that analysis by arguing that such an approach leads to a reconceptualization of strategy, HRM, and expertise as closely linked to the construction of 'rationality' and 'reality'. Furthermore, it is argued that discourse is a more appropriate concept than 'rhetoric' for understanding the 'internal logic' or 'specific rationality' of a particular set of texts. From the prescriptive management literature some key 'objects' are identified and the chapter concludes with a discussion of how the construction of rationality in the prescriptive literature can be analysed in terms of two 'repertoires' in which these 'objects' are ordered and aligned. However, there will be no

attempt to identify any particular conceptualization of 'strategy' or 'HRM' as superior to others. It is argued that the emphasis should be on the ways in which conceptualizations are *particular* and on the consequent effects of that particularity: the concepts are constructed in particular ways for particular reasons.

There have been a number of different approaches to the use of 'discourse' for the study of organizations. For example, Boden (1994) focuses on interactions in organizations and examines the development of 'local logic' and 'everyday rationalities'. Mumby, on the other hand, focuses on communication and power in organizations and argues that 'the art of storytelling is a political act that has consequences for the reproduction of organizational reality' (1988:xv). Mangham (1986) uses a microsituational approach to focus on one afternoon meeting of a small group of managers. Watson (1994b) reports on participant observation in one organization and uses the term discourse 'to conceptualize the idea of there being whole ways of talking about issues which influence understandings and which function to persuade people to act in particular ways' (1994b:113). Rossiter (1995) utilizes Watson's conceptualization in an examination of how the 'rhetoric of customer choice' has consequences for industrial relations change in a particular company. Kamoche (1995) uses an interpretivist approach to examine the construction of HRM within one organization.

As Potter and Wetherell (1991) argue 'discourse analysis' has been applied in different ways. In the next chapter the focus will not be on microsituational interactions but on how objects and relationships are constructed in the prescriptive literature and by managers in interviews. In the following chapters the approaches to studying organizations through the analysis of discourse are adapted to a study of the development of 'knowledge' of the management of people in work organizations as HRM/personnel 'expertise'. An analysis of discourse is a particularly appropriate method for studying 'strategy' and 'HRM' because the changing definitions become the focus of attention in the examination of how discourses are constructed. The focus is on how the concept of 'discourse' (following

Knights and Morgan 1995:200) provides a means for examining the particular way in which the relationship between the organization, the environment and the subject was constituted and reconstituted as 'strategy' and 'HRM' became more significant. The aim is not to examine discourse in a particular organizational setting nor to focus on subjectivity but to develop an approach for examining, first, the construction of discourse in prescriptive management literature and, second, the discourse of managers.

Miller and Rose (1990), Rose (1992), and du Gay (1996a) use Foucauldian-inspired approaches to examine the constitution of subjectivity through the positioning of organizational participants by discourses of 'excellence' and the enterprise culture. These discourses are related to the political context, to the rise of the New Right, to the 'new wave management' reviewed by Wood (1989), and to the 'articulation of a new vocabulary of the employment relationship' (du Gay 1996a:59). Du Gay argues that the language of enterprise is inscribed within contemporary management discourse (1996a:64). Although the focus of this thesis is not on 'subjectivity' the approach described in these analyses is important because of the emphasis on the connections made in the articulation of a 'new vocabulary'.

The prescriptive literature can be located in specific historical circumstances and to contemporary social, economic and political circumstances. The links between HRM, strategic discourse, and the discourses of excellence/enterprise are important because, as Miller and Rose argue:

'the vocabulary of entrepreneurship does not merely seek to shape the way bosses calculate and activate business strategies in the external world of the market, but also can be formulated by the experts of management into a new set of techniques for ensuring business success' (1990:26).

Rose (1992) argues that 'enterprise culture' can be understood in terms of the particular connections that it establishes between three 'dimensions' - the political, the institutional, and the ethical - which he derives from the work of Foucault. The first - 'political' - dimension he identifies is concerned with 'governmentality'. It includes:

‘the complex of notions, calculations, strategies and tactics through which diverse authorities - political, military, economic, theological, medical etc. - have sought to act upon the lives and conducts of each and all in order to avert evils and achieve such desirable states as health, happiness, wealth and tranquillity’ (1992:143).

The second dimension - the ‘institutional’ - construes institutions as ‘human technologies’ which are ‘practices which put in play certain assumptions and objectives concerning the selves that inhabit them’. These are:

‘embodied in the design of institutional space, the arrangement of institutional time and activity, procedures of reward and punishment, and the operation of systems of norms and judgements. They can be thought of as “technological” in that they seek the calculated orchestration of the activities of selves. They attempt to simultaneously maximise certain capacities of individuals and constrain others in accordance with particular knowledges - medical, psychological, pedagogic - and towards particular ends, responsibility, discipline, diligence, and so forth’ (1992:144).

The ‘third dimension’ is ‘ethical’ in the sense that it involves:

‘a means by which individuals come to construe, decipher, act upon themselves in relation to the true and the false, the permitted and the forbidden, the desirable and the undesirable’ (1992:144).

An understanding of discourse encompassing these three dimensions can, therefore, locate the constitution of subjectivity at work within a framework which identifies the construction and articulation of a ‘political’ rationality in which ‘technologies’, practices and expert knowledges are rational and necessary.

Strategy

In Chapter One the importance of the concept of ‘strategy’ to several different management science perspectives was demonstrated. However, the use of the concept by such a variety of perspectives means that there are a number of problems with definition (which, Shaw 1990 argues, are inherent in the concept³). This is important because the definition of such a concept has an impact on the evidence that may be found to support its

³ Shaw (1990:472) argues that strategic analysis is flawed, as a freestanding method, in the field of its origin (i.e. military usage) and that it cannot, therefore, be simply transferred to any and every other field of social life.

existence or the extent of its usage: generally, the broader the definition, the more evidence can be found while a narrower definition limits the empirical evidence⁴.

For example, *a priori* definitions of 'strategy' can be so tight (e.g. Thurley and Wood, 1983) that there is little chance of finding strategies. There appears to be little evidence of employers following a narrow definition of 'strategy' in connection with the management of people at work. On the other hand, *a priori* definitions may be so loose that any managerial action can be called 'strategic'. Similarly, *a posteriori* definitions, in terms of practice, are problematic in that they tend to suggest that anything that managers do is 'strategic' because 'strategy' is what managers do. There is another danger in that accounts of strategy may be actually *post hoc* rationalizations of *ad hoc* policies. Furthermore, researchers may attribute strategic intent where none actually exists. These issues become a particular problem where the analysis involves discussion of 'levels' within an organization where the higher 'levels' are concerned with strategy and therefore everything that is done at those higher levels is classified as 'strategic'.

There are further definitional problems concerned with 'levels'. Strategy is defined sometimes in terms of a wide variety of levels (e.g. corporate/business/ manufacturing strategies, business/industrial relations strategies, trans-national/ national/business unit/labour process strategies, etc.) and sometimes in opposition to other levels (e.g. strategic/ operational, strategy/policy, strategy/tactics, etc.). However, what is business strategy in one account is corporate strategy in another, and business and corporate may be synonymous in a third account. 'Strategy' in this sense is dependent on context for meaning.

The problem of the definition of 'strategy' is representative of a wider theoretical problem. As Storey argues:

'a rift is present, though partly disguised, which separates structurally-determinist positions and assumptions from a range of critical and frequently empirical positions which stress the indeterminacy of control systems...this split...is seen as reflective of

⁴ Wood and Kelly (1982) make this argument in respect of Taylorism.

a wider tension in the social sciences between those variously emphasising agency or structure' (1985:207).

These difficulties suggest that the way that the concept of 'strategy' is conceptualized has implications for its use as an analytical tool. This thesis argues that 'strategy' does not provide explanation but points towards a 'vacant area' where an explanation should be⁵. Rather than being a useful analytical tool, 'strategy' appears an obfuscating device. As Knights and Morgan (1990, 1991, 1995) argue from a Foucauldian perspective 'while strategy is a "suitable case" for theoretical treatment, it is not in itself a resource for, or tool of, sociological analysis' (1990:482). From this perspective, however, 'strategy' is a suitable *topic* for analysis.

Knights and Morgan (1995) examine 'management discourse' and 'strategic discourse' and the effects on the subjectivity of individual members of staff in the finance industry. They argue that:

'the conditions rendering a particular discourse and practice possible are often accidental, discontinuous and incoherent' (1995:194).

They note that 'strategy' is part of the everyday language of actors in business and military organizations. In such contexts, they argue, 'the discourse and practice of strategy is distinctively a mechanism of power' (1990:476) which has an ideological and political function in that it reproduces certain sets of hierarchical social relationships and inequalities of material and symbolic rewards. It does this through legitimating power relations by referring to 'positivistic and scientific norms of rationality' (1990:477) and thereby presenting strategy as a body of 'neutral' expert knowledge.

⁵ Stedman Jones (1975:65) uses the term 'vacant area' to describe the concept of a 'labour aristocracy'.

They argue that such legitimacy becomes necessary with the separation of ownership and direct control as practices are no longer justified through property rights. Strategy is part of 'a more diffuse set of mediations' through which management seeks legitimacy. The scientific/positivist norms of rationality help to legitimate 'certain sets of hierarchical social relationships' which strategy as part of a discourse of power reproduces (1990:477). In addition, they suggest, 'strategy' functions to disable oppositional views of reality (1990:476). They focus on the unintended effects of strategic management which they see as:

'a technology of power in transforming managers and employees alike into subjects who secure their sense of purpose and reality by formulating, evaluating and conducting strategy' (1995:196).

Their understanding of 'strategic discourse' is:

'structured around the notion that "external" and "internal" environments are constituted by the discourse as a problem for which "strategy" offers itself as a solution. This takes the form of constituting and monitoring the environment in ways that produce "knowledge" which is then used as the basis for the organization to construct strategic plans as a framework and guide to its activities. But an effect of strategic discourse is to constitute the organization's members as self-consciously aware of the competitive struggle for power and to render them "open" to techniques of rational control and evaluation in its pursuit' (1995:198).

Knights and Morgan argue that each grouping (e.g. banks, insurance companies and building societies) needs to be examined in detail 'to understand the particular way in which the relationship between the organization, the environment and the subject was constituted' (1995:200). In the Life Insurance industry, they argue, 'Changes in the environment become constructed as imperatives towards "strategic change"' (1995:205).

Knights and Morgan point out that strategists are reluctant to admit failure. They argue that strategists:

'reconstitute the goals and end results of strategy so it can be defined as a success. Mistakes and failures are relegated to the status of minor tactics and attributed to weaknesses in the organization that can only be eradicated by invoking the discourse and practice of strategy. In this sense, then, strategy is self-fulfilling in its effects' (1990:480).

Where it is 'beyond the realms of credibility' to define a strategy as successful, strategists explain failure in terms of unforeseeable contingencies and incompetent managers and can use these explanations to argue for improvements in strategies.

Knights and Morgan argue that, while the non-critical sociological usage⁶ and the management science usage imply that 'strategy' is 'neutral' with respect to the 'objects' to which it is applied (1990:476), a critical approach sees the concept as serving certain interests. Rather than seeing strategy as a means for 'rational' intervention in the environment, Knights and Morgan see it as 'a technique for transforming managers and employees into committed goal-oriented and self-disciplined subjects' (1990:479). They argue that 'the discourse and practice becomes self-legitimizing and self-reproducing' (1990:479).

Knights and Morgan argue that 'Strategy may be seen as less important in terms of its explicit and concrete goals than it is in relation to its implicit effects' (1990:479). While noting the debate around the concept of 'strategy' in academic texts (different levels, implementation, time-scale, action-structure dualism, imputing strategy to actors where it does not exist) they argue that 'there can be no definitive answers to these questions' (1990:479). 'Strategy' maintains its importance within the discourse in spite of the difficulties because it 'serves a social function relating the organization to the outside environment and the different groups and parts of the organization to each other' (1990:476). Knights and Morgan argue that 'the imprecise, incomplete, or even contested nature of...accounts strengthens rather than weakens strategic discourse and practice' (1990:480). They argue that:

'the uncritical adoption of the concept of strategy obscures the extent to which sociological accounts may themselves constitute knowledge that further enhances the strategic power of business corporations in providing them with additional techniques to control the labour market' (1990:481).

⁶ 'Non critical' in this context includes what has been identified in this thesis as the 'critical' HRM literature.

‘Strategy’ has a key function in the problematization of particular issues in the prescriptive literature. As Knights and Morgan argue, strategy is:

‘a discourse that also constitutes the problems which it then claims to have an exclusive expertise in solving. Problems and solutions are then mutually constituted through the discourse of strategy, but they are also always in a state of flux or in a continuous process of reconstitution’ (1991:267).

Rouleau and Seguin (1995) provide a taxonomic classification scheme for knowledge in the area of strategy. They identify five forms of discourse in strategy - the classical form, the contingency form, the socio-political form (based on explanation in terms of groups), the socio-cognitive form (interpretative forms of explanation), and the emerging ‘critical’ form. Their scheme is derived from organization theories which means, they argue, that the classification principles ‘lie outside of strategic discourse’ (1995:112). They argue that every definition of strategy can be considered an ‘amalgam’ of three components - the environment, the organization, and the individual (1995:106).

In Chapter One various conceptualizations of ‘strategy’ developed in the management literature were described. In this analysis it is argued that no particular version of ‘strategy’ is superior or more appropriate than others and various conceptualizations are articulated in discourse as the connections between key ‘objects’ are established. This point will be illustrated in the analysis of the transcripts of interviews with managers in which rational, incremental, emergent and process theories are articulated in the course of the discursive construction of organizational ‘reality’.

HRM

No *a priori* distinction is made in this analysis between prescriptive HRM literature and prescriptive personnel literature. It is argued that the HRM/personnel distinction can only be made in discourse.

A discourse approach prioritizes different questions to those posed by the ‘critical’ literature - not ‘what is HRM?’, but ‘how is HRM constructed in specific discourses and contexts?’, not ‘to what extent does HRM correspond with reality’ but ‘how is reality

constructed in discourse?'. By focusing on the *effects* in discourse of a particular construction and on the necessary conditions of a particular construction this approach provides a means of going beyond the debates in the 'critical' literature which, in the attempt to define and delineate HRM as a subject suitable for academic examination, restrain and restrict the study of HRM to an examination of the implementation of relatively few policies consistent with that definition and delineation⁷. The focus on discourse provides a means of locating HRM as a distinctive and cohesive attempt to manage and govern people.

However, a discourse approach cannot offer a simple definition of HRM as an object of discourse because it emerges as an object from different discourses in different forms or dimensions: it is a map, a model, a theory, rhetoric, a prescription, a description, an overarching philosophy, a justification, a legitimating device, an academic subject, a symbol, a mission statement, an umbrella term, an ideology, a strategy, a department, a function, etc.

HRM as an object of discourse can be any, or any number of these, in any particular circumstance. The processes of separating or grouping these dimensions or forms is what happens in a discourse (such as the 'critical' literature or the prescriptive literature). Discourse analysis does not contribute to separating or grouping but focuses on such practices as evidence of the way that discourse is constructed. Similarly, discourse analysis is more concerned with the effect of an object being defined in a certain way - as not something else (e.g. HRM as not personnel, not IR, etc.) - than in attempting to adjudicate between rival claims.

It is argued that the construction of HRM discourse involves the construction of a 'rationality' and a 'reality' in which key objects are located, ordered and aligned. This leads to, in effect, the 'integration' of policies and practices. However, such 'integration' is not

⁷ This argument is elaborated in Chapter Four

solely in terms of policies which ‘fit’ together or which ‘fit’ with corporate strategies, but rather in terms of integration within a broader discourse of a constructed rationality and reality that aligns policies and practices as objects with other key objects (such as environment, organization and individual) and in so doing enables the policies and practices to fit with each other and with other ‘strategies’. However, this also problematizes objects and ‘discovers’ solutions. The focus in the analysis of prescriptive literature is on *how* HRM is integrated in discourse and *with what* HRM is integrated. It is ‘integration’ in this sense which provides the possibility of managing and governing people at work in a *programmatic* manner. Miller and Rose utilize Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ to describe how governing has a programmatic character. They argue that:

‘it is characterized by an eternal optimism that a domain or a society could be administered better or more effectively, that reality is, in some way or other, programmable. Hence the “failure” of one policy or set of policies is always linked to attempts to devise or propose programmes that would work better, that would deliver economic growth, productivity, low inflation, full employment or the like’ (1990:4).

The development of programmes is intricately linked with discipline and particular kinds of ‘knowledge’. As Gordon argues:

‘a programme is always something more than a formulation of wishes or intentions. Every programme also either articulates or presupposes a *knowledge* of the field of reality upon which it is to intervene and/or which it is calculated to bring into being’ (Gordon 1980:248).

In order to understand how the attempts to discipline and govern organizations and individuals operate through ‘mechanisms of rule’ Miller and Rose develop, from Callon and Latour, a notion of ‘government at a distance’ which they describe as:

‘the complex mechanisms through which it becomes possible to link calculations at one place with action at another, not through the direct imposition of a form of conduct by force, but through a delicate affiliation of a loose assemblage of agents and agencies into a functioning network’ (1990:9).

Miller and Rose argue that this does not simply involve dependence for funds, legitimacy or other resources, but the understanding that problems or goals are intrinsically

linked, that interests are consonant, and that solutions can be found by joining forces or working along the same lines. Miller and Rose argue that:

‘This is not so much a process of appealing to mutual interests as of what Callon and Latour call “*interressement*” - the construction of allied interests through persuasion, intrigue, calculation or rhetoric’ (1990:10).

Expertise

A key contribution of HRM discourse is in the area of ‘expertise’. Expertise is linked to objectivity and authority. As Torrington argues, authority is a strong feature of management, and such authority is based on expertise (1989:65). Knights and Morgan (1990) argue that ‘strategy’ is presented as a body of ‘neutral’ expert knowledge. Similarly, Miller and Rose argue that government at a distance mechanisms rely upon expertise - ‘the social authority ascribed to particular agents and forms of judgement on the basis of their claims to possess specialized truths and rare powers (1990:2). Rose (1992) argues that expertise is important in at least three respects:

‘First, the grounding of authority in a claim to scientificity and objectivity establishes in a unique way the distance between systems of self-regulation and the formal organs of political power that is necessary within liberal democratic rationalities of government. Second, expertise can mobilise and be mobilised within political argument in distinctive ways, producing a new relationship between knowledge and government. Expertise becomes accorded a particular role in the formation of programmes of government and in the technologies that seek to give them effect. Third, expertise operates through the particular relation that it has with the self-regulating capacities of subjects. For the plausibility inherent in a claim to scientificity and rationalized efficacy binds subjectivity to truth, and subjects to experts, in new and potent ways’ (1992:148).

Miller and Rose argue that management ‘has come to depend upon expertise not only concerning the technical features of production, but also concerning the psychological features of the producing subjects’ (1990:2). Rose suggests that:

‘expertise plays the role of relay between objectives that are economically desirable and those that are personally seductive, teaching the arts of self-realization that will enhance employees as individuals as well as workers. Economic success, career progress and personal development intersect in this new expertise of autonomous subjectivity: work has become an essential element in the path to self-realization, and the strivings of the autonomous self have become essential allies in the path to economic success’ (1992:154).

Rationality

As has been noted, Keenoy uses a concept of '*primary purpose*' in connection with HRM. However, the term 'discourse', rather than *primary purpose*, is preferred here because discourse is understood as a technology of production in that it produces (in addition to legitimation and justification) the concepts, subjectivities, rationalizations and techniques (e.g. policies, practices) which make possible a specialized and expert 'knowledge' of work, workers, and the management of both.

Whilst Keenoy's concept of '*primary purpose*' refers to the intention of rhetoric, discourse analysis focuses on effect. The concept of '*primary purpose*' directs analysis towards the provision of managerial legitimation for practices: understanding HRM as a product of discourse goes further by focusing on the means by which 'reality' and subjectivities are constituted within it.

'Logic' is a key discursive resource in the construction of 'reality', 'rationality' and subjectivity because it is associated with objectivity and 'scientific' approaches. However, as Winch argues:

'criteria of logic are not a direct gift of God, but arise out of, and are only intelligible in the context of, ways of living or modes of social life' (Winch 1958:100).

Discourse obeys the logic of its' own rationality - *only*. The internal logic of a discourse is constructed in and through that discourse - as is 'truth' and 'reality'. For the problem with the treatment of HRM as such a 'cultural construction' (Keenoy and Anthony 1992:234) is that it leads to a theoretical conundrum concerning what can be said about a circuitously closed ideological system which defines 'reality' and excludes all possible alternative 'realities'. Similarly, Thompson sees 'dangers' in an approach which relies on 'self-enclosed discourses' (1993:198). Critiques which come from 'alien' epistemologies can be brushed aside as academic irrelevancies by those operating within the system (Keenoy and Anthony 1992:246). While such alien discourses may not be able to engage in traditional critique, an analysis of HRM as a product of discourse can be successful through

a refocusing on questions of *how* a discourse is constructed and what effects such a construction has.

Townley argues that there are three principle areas of 'knowledge' which the management of personnel requires:

knowledge of the workforce or 'population';

knowledge of the activity or labour to be undertaken, that is, 'work'; and

knowledge of the individual, the 'worker' (1994:13).

These areas of knowledge are, however, areas of knowledge of the interior of organizations and it will be argued that they are dependent on knowledge of the 'environment' in which organizations operate and on a form of 'rationality' which links the environment to organizations and to individuals.

What follows is not a critique of the prescriptive literature based on logic. A critique on the basis of logic or rationality would lead to a challenge at the first 'logical' step with little need to go further, as will be seen below. Such an approach which criticises the prescriptive literature for failing to conform to external standards of rationality would be inappropriate for, as Du Gay argues:

'To appeal to the "logical contradictions" of contemporary management discourse, and to the even more basic underlying "contradictions of capitalism", in order to show that this project can never "really work" is to misunderstand the ways in which discourse/ideology operates. For discourse/ideology doesn't "work" in a logical intellectual fashion. It doesn't collapse as the result of a logical contradiction because it does not obey the logic of rational discourse' (1996a:67-8).

The aim of a discourse analysis of the prescriptive literature is to track the 'internal logic' of the prescriptive literature and to locate the emergence of HRM/personnel expertise in discourse as an 'integrating' body of knowledge and a programmatic set of techniques for ensuring business success through the management and government of people at work in a 'reality' represented in a form 'suitable for deliberation, argumentation, scheming and intervention' (du Gay 1996a:54). As Townley argues, HRM practices:

- ‘do not “reflect” reality: they actively order and create it. They “discipline” the interior of the organization by organizing time, space, and movement, and by categorizing and measuring tasks, behaviour and interactions’ (1994:14).

As will be demonstrated, the prescriptive literature does not necessarily work in a logical, intellectual fashion. However, to those using the discourse, it appears logical and rational. This is possible partly because external standards of rationality are undermined within the discourse by notions of ‘common sense’ and reactions against overcomplexity. For example, Peters and Waterman (1982) argue against the rationality of business school approaches and for ‘simplicity’ (Simple Form, Lean Staff, etc.). In the follow-up book Peters and Austin (1985) argue for ‘common sense’. However, the prescriptive literature also appears ‘logical’ and ‘rational’ because of the particular way in which major objects - such as environment, organization, and individual - are understood. From a Foucauldian perspective:

‘rational practices are only “rational” from the point of view of the groups which generate them’ (Morgan 1990:102).

In the following analysis of the prescriptive literature as an example of discourse the focus is on the ‘internal logic’ of this particular discourse - that is, on what Foucault termed the ‘specific rationality’ (Smart 1995) - for it is from its ‘specific rationality’ that HRM/personnel expertise emerges to ‘integrate’ its major objects.

The prescriptive literature, then, limits its domain by delineation (HRM, personnel, IR, human relations, etc.) by presenting HRM as ‘new’. It defines issues and problems for debate (strategy, fit, development, etc.) and defines what it is talking about by naming them as ‘objects’ (personnel, people, human, resources) which are manifest and describable. It can be understood as a space in which various objects - environment, organization, individuals, HRM, strategy, etc. - emerge and are continuously transformed.

This is not to argue that HRM or other managerial initiatives are not rhetorical: the discourse of the literature and the discourse of managers can be analysed as rhetoric used for persuasion. For example, Hamilton (1996) argues that various debates surrounding

HRM can be analysed through the ‘viewfinder of the five canons of classical rhetoric: *inventio, dispositio, elocution, memoria, and pronuntiatio*’ (1996:13). Watson (1995b) draws attention to various rhetorical tricks and devices in an analysis of a short piece of managerial dialogue utilized as an illustration of the centrality of rhetoric in thought and communication.

Nonetheless, in this thesis it is argued that while ‘everything within the HRM story is rhetorical’ (Hamilton 1996:22) HRM discourse has effects beyond persuasion.

Key ‘objects’ - environment, organization, individuals

In an analysis of discourse the goals, policies and practices (e.g. the four ‘goals’ of HRM identified by Guest 1987) can be identified as ‘objects’ of discourse. However, the management of people in work organizations is not reducible to these because they make sense in discourse only because of a particular ‘knowledge’ of the environment, organizations and individuals and the relationships between them⁸. Categories such as ‘environment’, ‘organization’, and ‘individual’ are usually taken to refer to fixed objects but they can be seen as ‘socially constructed’ (Whitley 1992). A discourse analysis approach must take account of the constructed nature of objects.

This is the key point: in an analysis of discourse ‘environment’, ‘organization’, and ‘individuals’ are not ‘natural’ phenomena but are historically contingent ‘objects’ of discourse. The conceptualization of ‘environment’ is a product of discourse and, as will be argued, is to a large extent dependent on the conceptualization of ‘organization’. There is no fixed boundary between the two objects except the boundary established in discourse: they are equally dependent on each other. Therefore, the four most important objects which emerge from the prescriptive literature are:

the environment - as rapidly changing, as a battlefield;

organizations - as impelled to change by the environment;

⁸ The importance of concepts of environment, organization and individual/subject has been emphasised in Knights and Morgan (1995:200) and Rouleau and Seguin (1995:106).

individuals -as impelled to change by the changing needs of the organization; and,

HRM/personnel - as expert knowledge of the environment, organizations and individuals, and as expert knowledge of policies and practices which can mediate the relationship between them.

Discourse in the prescriptive literature, in effect, provides a means of constructing 'reality' in terms of environment, organizations, and individuals, and produces HRM as expert knowledge 'which renders visible the arena of work for the purposes of governance' (Townley, 1994:14).

Processes of integration and '*interessement*' enable concepts of environment, organization, and individuals to be brought into what Miller and Rose call a 'loose and approximate, and always mobile and indeterminate alignment' (1990:10).

What follows, then, is an attempt to track the arguments and explanations used in the construction of HRM discourse in management literature. The 'reasons' given for implementing certain policies in the prescriptive HRM/personnel literature may not always be strictly 'rational' but they do provide accounts which give 'reasons' why certain policies and practices should be implemented and other policies and practices discarded. Such accounts can be regarded as articulating the 'specific rationality' or the 'internal logic' of the discourse. What makes the discourse of the prescriptive HRM/personnel literature difficult to untangle is that there may be more than one 'rationality' being constructed and utilized at the same time.

The construction of rationality in the prescriptive management literature - 'repertoires'

In analysing discourse it can appear that some sections of a text are rational and coherent but that these sections contradict other sections. One approach to disentangling such sections of discourse is by using 'interpretative repertoires' (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Interpretative repertoires are:

‘recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena. A repertoire...is constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions’ (1987:149).

As an example, Potter and Wetherell use research in the field of biochemistry carried out by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) in which they describe how scientists’ accounts are constructed to portray actions and beliefs in ‘contextually appropriate ways’. Gilbert and Mulkay identified accounts which they called formal (accounts in articles/publications) and informal (accounts given in interviews). They argue that these accounts can be understood in terms of two broad repertoires - the ‘empiricist repertoire’ in the formal context of research papers, and the ‘contingent repertoire’ in the informal interviews in which a wider range of lexical, grammatical, and stylistic resources was used. The ‘contingent repertoire’:

‘portrayed actions and beliefs as heavily dependent on speculative insights, prior intellectual commitments, personal characteristics, unspecifiable craft skills, social ties and group membership’ (Potter and Wetherell 1987:149).

From this perspective, repertoires are internally coherent but there may be contradictions between repertoires. In this thesis the term ‘repertoire’ is used to distinguish between sections of discourse in which different ‘specific rationalities’ are constructed. However, the repertoires are not critiqued on the basis of external standards of rationality. The users of the discourse treat their accounts as reasonable, accurate, truthful and natural, at least in as much as they are not irrational. These accounts, therefore, display a ‘specific rationality’ which is internal to the prescriptive literature. Several repertoires can be identified in the prescriptive literature but in this account of HRM discourse the focus is on two particular repertoires which will be tracked through.

This dualism identified in the prescriptive literature reflects a duality in several approaches to the study of the management of people in work organizations. Hollway notes that the definition of the field of British industrial psychology in the 1950s could be encapsulated in the slogan ‘Fitting the man to the job and the job to the man (FMJ/FJM)’ (Hollway 1991:5). The ‘critical’ HRM literature distinguishes between the Tichy *et al* and

Beer *et al* approaches, between hard and soft, narrow and ‘catch-all’ versions of HRM, between HRM and personnel, between internal and external fit, unitary and pluralistic approaches, official and unofficial cultures, loose and tight versions, classical and processual perspectives, and so on.

Rather than conceptualizing dualities in management discourse as indicating competing or alternative accounts the next chapter argues that they are complementary and are used contemporaneously. The two repertoires identified in the discourse of the prescriptive management literature display many of the features of previous analytical dichotomies but, it is argued, actually correspond to none. They are identified, not on the basis of different components, but on the basis of different orderings of the key ‘objects’ of discourse. In the next chapter the repertoires are designated, in as neutral a manner as is practical, ‘repertoire A’ and ‘repertoire B’.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has described and examined an alternative approach to the study of HRM derived from a Foucauldian conceptualization of ‘discourse’. ‘Discourse’ has been described and Foucauldian-inspired studies focusing on power, knowledge, surveillance, and the constitution of subjectivity were examined. The implications for the way that ‘strategy’, ‘HRM’, ‘expertise’, and ‘rationality’ are conceptualized were discussed. Three key ‘objects’ of discourse (environment, organization, individuals) were identified and it was argued that these ‘objects’ are discursively constructed and then ordered and aligned in causal relationships (‘repertoires’) in discourse. It was argued that the apparently contradictory ‘repertoires’ are complementary within the ‘rationality’ or ‘internal logic’ of managerial discourse. The approach described in this chapter provides the basis for an analysis of prescriptive management literature as discourse in Chapter Three which, in turn, provides a framework utilized in Part II in an examination and analysis of interviews with HR/personnel managers.

CHAPTER THREE - THE PRESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE AS DISCOURSE

In this chapter prescriptive management literature is analysed as a discourse in which the concepts of 'strategy' and 'HRM' are constructed to perform key functions. In this discourse 'strategy' and 'HRM' are not problematized but are utilized as solutions to the problems identified by the discourse. 'Strategy' and 'HRM' are constructed as 'objects' of discourse that are linked to the construction of two different 'rationalities' (identified as 'repertoire A' and 'repertoire B'). In this chapter these repertoires are first examined individually and then together as they appear in discourse.

The next chapter identifies the processes by which HRM has been constructed as an academic subject that can be examined and critiqued on the basis of a transcendental 'rationality' that is established 'externally' to HRM discourse by the 'critical' literature. However, this chapter focuses on how the construction of HRM in discourse is linked to the construction of 'specific rationalities'. From this perspective 'rationality' is understood as the 'internal logic' of a discourse which is constructed *by* that discourse. It is argued that in HRM discourse the two 'repertoires' construct key 'objects' (environment, organization, and individual) and order and align those objects. The two 'repertoires' are identified on the basis of this ordering and alignment rather than on the basis of which component objects are constructed. In repertoire A the environment determines the organization that, in turn, determines the individuals. In repertoire B the environment determines the individuals and the individuals determine the organization.

Repertoire A: environment → organization → individual

Repertoire B: environment → individual → organization

Both repertoires are internally coherent, even from the perspective of an 'alien' epistemology. Although these two repertoires may appear to contradict each other, it is

argued that within the discourse of the prescriptive management literature they are complementary.

It should be noted that although only two 'repertoires' are identified as important in this analysis, there are other possible 'repertoires' that order and align 'objects'. The most obvious of these is what may be called a 'best practice' repertoire that ignores the environment. Such a repertoire would assert that a certain model of organization is superior and that individuals must 'fit' the organizational requirements (organization → individual). Despite the popularity of the term 'best practice', little evidence of such a 'repertoire' was found in either the prescriptive literature or interviews with managers. Nor was there much evidence of 'repertoires' that understood the environment as determined by organization and/or individuals. Hence, the focus in this analysis is limited to just two 'repertoires' that represent 'rationalities' made specific by reference to the particular circumstances in which organizations operate.

It will be argued that one important feature common to 'repertoire A' and 'repertoire B' is the idea of 'change' - including environmental change, organizational change, individual change, and policy change. As du Gay argues:

'This language of "change" - invariably the sort that challenges - is a constitutive element of contemporary management discourse' (1996b:153).

The repertoires start from the idea of 'change' in the environment and such accounts of environmental change appear difficult to refute: it is almost impossible to argue that the environment is static, that there is no change. There is a remarkable consensus surrounding this type of an account of environmental change. For example, Hyman (1987) provides a similar type of account from an IR perspective and Legge (1989) provides an account of environmental change from the 'critical' HRM literature perspective. Such consensus provides strong support for claims that an account is 'truthful'.

However, the prescriptive literature account of environmental change provides a particular understanding of what the environment is, and hence, what policies and practices

should be pursued. In the prescriptive literature environmental change is presented as particular to the present. For example, Skinner, Grandi and Martin argue that 'Pace and pressure characterize today's business environment' (1989b:33). Peters (1987) refers to 'an era of unprecedented uncertainty' characterized as 'chaos' and 'a world turned upside down'. Such emphasis on current major environmental change can be found in prescriptive management literature covering various aspects of the management of people in work organizations. For example, with regard to strategic training and development, Nixon refers to 'today's conditions of major change and upheaval' (1989:14); Gratton and Syrett, writing on succession strategies, refer to 'fast-moving markets, involving shorter product life-cycles, shorter consumer time spans, rapid changes in technology and unpredictable demand' (1990:34); Prentice, discussing the necessity for 'soft' management styles, starts from 'the quickening pace of change' (1990:58); Selkirk writes of an 'explosion of demand' for NHS services (1991:26); Fullerton and Price note the instability in the NHS and the changes brought about through recent legislation (1991:50). Similarly, 'The pace of change has increased dramatically in recent years and shows every sign of continuing to do so' (Manchester Open Learning 1993:7) and '*Nothing is simple anymore. Nothing is stable. The business environment is changing before our eyes, rapidly, radically, perplexingly*' (Champy 1995:9). This type of account of environmental change informs both repertoires and contributes towards the construction of 'reality'. As Kanter argues:

'Organizational change consists in part of a series of emerging constructions of reality, including revision of the past, to correspond to the requisites of new players and new demands. Organizational history *does* need to be rewritten to permit events to move on' (Kanter 1986:287, quoted in Keenoy and Anthony 1992:249).

Environmental change, then, is presented as uncontrollable, uncertain, chaotic and demanding of an immediate response. Accounts which suggest that environments have always been this way are not recognised: they can be dismissed because they do not come from the management literature but from 'alien' epistemologies (Keenoy and Anthony 1992) - such as the 'critical' HRM literature. As has been noted, discourse limits the

possible alternative ways in which a subject can be constructed (Hall 1992) but from the particular 'knowledge' of the environment and of change identified in the prescriptive literature, *two* individual repertoires are constructed. The key objects - environment, organization, and individual - are constructed in both repertoires. The repertoires can be distinguished on the basis of the ordering and alignment of those objects. It is through the processes of ordering and alignment that the 'specific rationalities' are constructed. In this chapter each repertoire is first explored separately to demonstrate that the discourse of the prescriptive literature can be understood in this way. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the repertoires are combined in discourse.

Repertoire A (environment → organization → individual)

In repertoire A the environment is very much 'out there' - external to organizations. It is depicted as rapidly changing, full of uncertainty, full of other potentially hostile entities (e.g. competitors, unions, governments, bankers, the EU, Japan and the 'tiger' economies), and completely uncontrollable. In this context the organization appears sharply demarcated, self-contained and embattled.

As an example of how this account might be contested, it could be argued that it ignores the massive intervention of organizations in the 'market', by individual organizations (most obviously in the form of advertising and PR, but also as employers and investors) and by organizational groupings (CBI, lobbyists, price-fixing cartels, etc.). It also ignores the role of its own workforce as consumers, as members of unions, and as citizens and voters. In such an alternative account the division between organization and environment is unclear and open: the organization and its members are seen as contributing to the creation of the environment. The provision of this alternative account is not intended to be part of a critique of the prescriptive account (which prescriptive HRM/personnel

literature would dismiss as ‘alien’) but to illustrate the particularity of repertoire A in the prescriptive literature.

The first step in repertoire A is that the uncontrollable environment ‘out there’ requires the organization to change. For example:

‘organizational change stems more from environment impact than from any other factor’ (Georgiades 1990:44).

‘When changes occur in the environment in which an organization operates, then that organization has to change to remain healthy and competitive’ (Manchester Open Learning 1993:29).

However, more than this, the uncontrollable environment *necessitates* change. The organization is impelled to respond. Although this impellent does not (logically) necessarily imply any particular response, repertoire A contrasts the uncontrollable environment with a controllable organization: the organization can and *must* change to meet the ‘challenge’ by being enterprising, flexible, responsive, and adaptive through changed structures and practices. The urgency, the lack of doubt, and the *necessity* of a response are repeatedly affirmed in the prescriptive literature. For example:

‘external change, which invariably cannot be controlled is often thrust upon the organization and creates the need for internal change. Although it may not have been anticipated or predetermined, internal change can be controlled and managed’ (Stewart and Hamblin 1990:11).

‘There is no question that there is an increasing need for a complex organization in today’s world to change its shape to accommodate changing demands’ (Beckhard 1992:95).

‘Mounting evidence shows those organizations which will survive and flourish are the most flexible and responsive - the most able to manage the processes of change in a volatile business climate’ (Skinner, Grandi and Martin 1989a:41).

‘In recent years intensification of competition in the outside market has led to the refocussing of organizational effort in the internal market, within and between departments, and in the extended internal market in the supply chain. They have adopted a variety of management tactics including: devolution and decentralization of decision-making, total quality and lean organizational initiatives, more project-based, cross functional initiatives and team working, empowered rather than command structures, partnership approaches to supplier links’ (Stevens 1995:2).

These descriptions of the relationship between the environment and the organization can be thought of as versions of contingency theory with similar claims as those of Thompson who argues:

‘organizations do some of the basic things they do because they must - or else!’ (1967:1).

This association with a long-established theory assists with the establishment of such claims in the prescriptive literature as ‘truthful’. However, this kind of a description functions as part of a *prescription* and, therefore, problematizes certain issues and avoids others. The account of the relationship between environment and organization provided by repertoire A is similar in many respects to what Therborn refers to as the ‘subjectivist problematic’ - produced by systems approaches to organizational theory. This conceptualizes a goal-oriented subject in an environment and is based on the notion of a basic dichotomy between the organizational subject and its ‘setting’ (1978:37).

Organizations are seen as ‘relatively distinct and semi-autonomous’ (Whitley 1989:209).

Repertoire A asserts that an organization can and must be adaptive and, most importantly, that an organization is something which can be designed. For example, Peters and Waterman argue:

‘when the environment changes, these [innovative] companies change too. As the needs of their customers shift, the skills of their competitors improve, the mood of the public perturbs, the forces of international trade align, and government regulations shift, these companies tack, revamp, adjust, transform, and adapt’ (1982:12).

Again, this particular account of organization can be challenged, in much the same way as the conceptualization of environment is challenged above. (Several examples of different ‘images’ of organization can be found in Morgan 1986.)

The particular account of the environment/organization relationship in repertoire A emphasises that the chaotic, uncertain and uncontrollable nature of environmental change *necessitates* a particular approach to managed internal change - one guided by a certain kind of expertise. For example, Stevens argues that organizations have undertaken a number of

initiatives to limit exposure to 'the cold winds of economic cycles' including downsizing, slimmer and flatter management structures, fewer specialists directly employed, and a flexible workforce (1995:2). Tichy *et al* start from the argument that 'technological, economic and demographic changes are pressurizing organizations to use more effective human resource management' (1982:47). Baird and Meshoulam follow a slightly different path, starting from the argument that 'technological, economic and social changes are causing organizations to depend more and more on human resources to accomplish their objectives' (1988:116). These repertoires problematize issues in a way that can be addressed by HRM expertise. The organization is adaptable in the particular sense that its human resources are, or can be made to be, adaptable. The organization can be designed in the particular sense that the human resources can be managed and ordered in different ways.

Certain concepts in repertoire A have key functions. 'Strategy', for example, is a key concept because the effect of its use is to define the organization and the environment and the boundary between them: the 'strategic' is the controllable 'inside', everything else is 'out there'. The concept of 'strategy' in repertoire A provides the mechanism by which 'the environment is uncontrollable' becomes 'the uncontrollable is the environment'. 'Strategy' in this context is not about rationality or coherence, but about control and discipline.

The next (not necessarily logical) step in the prescriptive repertoire A is that, in order to be adaptive, the organization must be peopled by certain types of individuals that are themselves adaptive and subject to strategies and discipline. For example, Stevens argues that the management agenda requires from employees:

'customer orientation to meet the needs of internal and external customers, greater self-management and responsibility for individuals and teams, contributions to the improvement of processes, products and services, commitment to personal training, development and adaptability' (1995:2).

Champy, arguing from a 'reengineering' perspective, provides an indication of the impact on individuals:

'Everyone must change. The change will go deeper than technique. It touches not merely what managers do, but who they are. Not just their sense of the task, but their sense of themselves. Not just what they know, but how they think. Not just their way of seeing the world, but their way of living in the world' (1995:10).

Similarly, Tichy *et al* work from political, cultural and economic forces, through mission, strategy, and structure, to the HRM policies of selection, process and placement.

They argue that:

'Companies that diversify or change their strategic direction need to alter traditional promotional patterns in order to move new types of people into new positions' (1982:51).

Stewart and Hamblin work from uncontrollable external change through controlled internal change to training which aims to:

'ensure the contribution of individuals and groups is maximised...primarily through the development of people as individuals, as work groups and as members of the wider organization' (1990:11).

The 'logical' step from the necessity of organizational change to the necessity of individual change necessitates a crucial role for managers. The prescriptive literature identifies 'leadership' as the critical quality of change managers (e.g. Peters and Austin 1985, Adair 1987, Manchester Open Learning 1993). Furthermore, this step from organization to individual in repertoire A involves another huge (and not necessarily logical by external standards) set of assumptions about workers. It implies that they are all individuals, are *only* individuals (as opposed to members of non-work groupings), *should* be only individuals, and that at least some are adaptive and that others can be manipulated into being adaptive. These assumptions about workers indicate a way of 'knowing' workers and a way of 'knowing' how they can be managed and governed. Skinner argues that:

'Managers can develop and tailor a workforce to meet the particular performance needs of an organization' (1981:112).

This way of 'knowing' corresponds to the 'eternal optimism' identified by Miller and Rose. It runs through repertoire A in the prescriptive literature and makes possible 'knowing' organizations and individuals as 'programmable'. It does not, in itself, imply any

particular policies or practices, but rather particular types of policies and practices. This means that particular sets of particular policies grouped together to form programmes are both possible and necessary. The ‘programmatic’ character of the prescriptive literature can be explicit. For example, Stevens argues that changes:

‘have set a management agenda which requires immense thought and hard work, often with new responsibilities, new values and a new culture. They require an approach to quality which is all pervading and systemic’ (1995:2).

It should be noted that repertoire A is not simply that the environment has changed and therefore the organization must change, but that the environment is constantly changing and uncontrollable and therefore organizations must constantly change (i.e. become ‘learning’ organizations) and managers/individuals must constantly change (Pascale 1990, Champy 1995). Peters (1987:xi) illustrates a similar approach claiming that ‘the times demand that flexibility and love of change’ replace the view of a relatively predictable environment which has now ‘vanished’.

The environment, organizations, and individuals are the three main ‘objects’ that emerge from repertoire A: they are constructed as ‘objects’ and are ‘known’ in a particular way that requires that the relationships between them are mediated in a particular way by a particular form of expert knowledge - HRM. What follows (not necessarily logically) from this account of environment, organization, and individuals is certain policies and practices, or strategies as sets of policies and practices. The discourse provides the means of capturing the ways in which organizations and individuals can, programmatically, be made adaptive.

Repertoire B (environment → individual → organization)

There are differences between the way that the key ‘objects’ are constructed in the two ‘repertoires’ but equally important is that the *orderings* of the key ‘objects’ is different. It is the difference in the ordering of the key ‘objects’ that is the basis of the identification of the two ‘repertoires’ as separate. In repertoire A the environment determines the organization that, in turn, determines the individuals. In repertoire B the environment

determines the individual and the nature, needs and talents of the individual determine the organization.⁹

In repertoire B the relationship between organization and environment is never as explicit as in repertoire A. This is because in repertoire B the argument moves directly from environmental to individual and then to organizational imperatives. It provides an account of the environment as 'natural' and of individuals in that environment having a human 'nature'. Repertoire B articulates more of a behavioural approach to individuals. However, as in repertoire A, change is a key concept: Bentley argues that:

'The management of change is almost completely associated with the way human beings adapt to cope effectively with the changes that occur' (1990:24).

Repertoire B articulates the general long-standing problems of managing people at work, such as motivation and commitment, and identifies solutions, often in psychological terms. It is from this understanding of what the individual is that the organizational imperatives are derived. Skinner argues that:

'People instinctively resent forces that manage and control them...The anti establishment seeds sown in the late 1960s and early 1970s are bearing fruit, and more employees than ever are unwilling to subject themselves to an organization or the discipline of a trade, profession or team' (1981:109).

While following the traditional line that 'A group of loyal, productive employees is an organization's most effective competitive weapon', Skinner problematizes the workforce in terms of 'variations among persons'. These variations include job and personal skills, attitudes, mass education, and 'good' and 'superb' employees. The problems of selecting and gaining commitment from the workforce necessitate an HRM strategy for planning, recruitment, development and commitment (1981:114). Similarly, Beer *et al* work from increased education of the work force to increasing responsibility for employees, they argue

⁹ The relationship between the organization and environment in repertoire A corresponds to Thompson's (1967) concept of 'closed system' and repertoire B to the 'open system'. Thompson's conceptualizations are more useful and appropriate than Gouldner's 'rational' and 'natural-system' categories (on which Thompson based his versions) because, as attributes, 'rational' and 'natural-system' are features that both repertoires would claim.

that changing values of the workforce cause re-examination of mechanisms for employee involvement, and suggest that changing workforce demographics requires changing policies, practices and managerial values (1985:5). In some accounts, the pressures of change on individuals mean that management needs to have strategies for communications (e.g. Manchester Open Learning 1993), teambuilding policies (e.g. Adair 1986, 1987), and/or culture change policies (e.g. Conlow 1991). Another version of repertoire B, which follows from the 'behavioural' authors, works from motivation studies to job design and job enlargement or enrichment. A typical example is Bottomley who argues that:

'What people want out of a job varies widely with age, sex, occupational level, social grouping and individual expectation. Nevertheless, numerous studies have shown that job satisfaction *can* be improved for many by changes being made in the nature of the job' (1983:24).

A positive view of human nature is provided by Fullerton and Price (1991) who suggest that the employees are 'devoted capable and enthusiastic' but are 'bound up' by bureaucracy. This requires a strategic response towards culture change. Similarly, Nixon argues that success in the future will come from 'attracting the ablest people, releasing their talents and energies and using them well' (1989:14). A solution is produced in terms of a training and development strategy. In this repertoire a positive view of individuals as created by the environment requires the organization to adapt to the attributes of those individuals. Hence, there is a 'people focus' on initiative, creativity, motivation, judgement, willing contributions, capability, adaptability, business orientation, and responsibility: these are the attributes which an organization must 'harness' (Stevens 1995). Peters (1987), in arguing for 'people power', emphasises 'empowering' people through the removal of barriers (such as bureaucracy and excessive levels in organizational structure) and the introduction of self-managing teams to 'involve people in everything'. This means that the workplace must be managed to 'maximise involvement' and utilize the talents unnoticed by traditional management approaches. He argues that the 'ultimate stage' of involvement is the 'regular, spontaneous taking of initiative' and this must be fostered by the creation of

the right 'climate'. Similarly, Jaap argues for 'enabling leadership'. He starts from the position that:

'People today are seeking new kinds of relationships with each other and with the organizations with which they associate. They want to work in a more collaborative way which allows them to make a valued contribution. Observing how an increasing number of organizations are changing, I am confident that a contribution process will emerge as an efficient vehicle to tap the energy, skill and commitment of people' (1986:3).

Such 'enabling leadership' requires the creation of environments which 'gain the commitment of those involved to see it changed for the benefit of all' (Jaap 1986:5).

Repertoire B provides the solutions to the problem of the individual in the environment through changing the way the organization hires people in order to recruit the 'correct' individuals and/or through designing organizations to capture or 'harness' the positive attributes of individuals. Peters and Waterman argue that while 'human nature' has many contradictions, 'We all think we're tops'. This leads them to argue that 'there is no reason why we can't design systems that continually reinforce this notion' (1982:57). In their 'soft is hard' 7-S framework they argue for a people orientation - characterized by 'completeness' - which has a 'tough side' including measurement, performance orientation, and peer review (1982:240). They say 'All that stuff you have been dismissing for so long as the intractable, irrational, intuitive, informal organization can be managed' (1982:11). Peters' (1987) prescriptions for 'involvement' include incentive pay and employment guarantees.

The 'rationality' of repertoire B, then, is that the individual - as delivered by the changes (education, demographics, etc.) in the environment - has a human nature that must be catered for by changes in organizational structure, culture, reward systems and benefits in order to harness and gain from the commitment, motivation, initiative, creativity, judgement, capability, adaptability, devotion, capabilities, enthusiasm, energy, and responsibility that lie dormant in individuals bound and smothered by bureaucracy and excessive structure. The difference in the ordering of the key 'objects' that identifies the

two ‘repertoires’ is an expression of different ‘specific rationalities’. The ‘specific rationalities’ contribute to the different ways in which the key ‘objects’ are constructed. In repertoire A the environment determines the organization that, in turn, determines the individuals. In repertoire B the environment determines the individual and the individuals determine the organization. In repertoire A the individual is a resource to be deployed to meet organizational needs. In repertoire B the organization is ‘no more and no less than collections of individuals undertaking a variety of tasks’ (Hunt 1992:302) and can be changed to meet (or harness) the needs and talents of those individuals.

The two repertoires combined in discourse

Although some correspondence may be found between these two repertoires and the dichotomies identified in the ‘critical’ HRM literature, this analysis will not focus on how separate or different the repertoires are, but on how they are combined in discourse. Many examples of each of the two repertoires can be found in the prescriptive literature. However, the focus in this section is on how the two repertoires are combined in discourse and how they are often combined within the same text. Whereas the ‘critical’ literature approach focuses on the contradictions and incoherence of HRM in this analysis it will be shown that different ‘specific rationalities’ can be understood as part of a single discourse.

Repertoire A problematizes the organization in the environment and then problematizes the individual in the organization. Repertoire B problematizes the individual in the environment and then problematizes the organization in relation to the individual. Thus, the key objects are aligned and ordered in ‘specific rationalities’ which construct relations between the objects:

<p>Repertoire A: environment → organization → individual</p> <p>Repertoire B: environment → individual → organization</p>

In this analysis, these two repertoires will be understood as part of a single discourse: they can appear as contradictory (to problematize a particular issue) and as complementary and mutually reinforcing..

Despite the repertoires constructing different rationalities, the repertoires can appear quite close together in the texts. This can provide problematizations in terms of, for example, conflict between the organizational needs resulting from the environment and what the organization must do for its employees. At its simplest, this approach can be found in accounts which problematize organizations by contrasting the corporate needs with the needs of the individual employees: this approach produces solutions in terms of some specific area of HRM expertise. For example, Bentley (1990) produces a solution from such repertoires in terms of Human Resource Strategies and 'Performance Management Systems' based on expertise in training and development. These match organizational and individual needs and bridge the gap between existing human abilities and the present and future job requirements. A more detailed account of culture change strategy formulation can be found in Fullerton and Price (1991). They describe the approach of the Grampian Health Board towards the issue of culture within a context of legislative change and instability in the NHS and identify two perspectives:

'The first was an opportunistic one which took the view that "people in the organization are devoted capable and enthusiastic, but they have been bound up in a bureaucratic system of indecision. If we can cut through this bureaucracy and create a culture of responsible risk-taking, then we can release huge amounts of human energy and talent". The second angle - a problem-solving view - had a darker side: "We are required to behave differently. Costs, responsiveness to customers expectations, and strategic direction are all under the microscope. Unless we succeed in changing the culture to a more action-orientated one, we will fail in meeting the demands placed on us"' (1991:50).

The solution is presented in terms of a need to 'manage culture actively'. After an information gathering exercise, common themes were identified and 16 specific objectives were developed in the areas of strategy, structure, management style, resources, and communication. In this 'rational' process the two repertoires are combined to form a single

list of problems. The solutions reflect both repertoires. For example, the lack of a comprehensive strategy meant that the reasons for doing things was unclear and/or poorly communicated. This was addressed by the development of 'a comprehensive strategic plan, supported by a participative and consistent planning process'. Management style was problematized as closed, defensive and not providing leadership. The solution was teamwork, shared objectives within the strategy, participative and supportive management style offering positive leadership. Resources were problematized as unfairly allocated and not used to best advantage. The solution was the consumption of resources 'strictly in accordance with the board's strategy - with staff being fully involved in effective resource management'. Grampian produced a vision, a mission, and a management approach. The management approach again displayed the two repertoires: 'We should be results-oriented and focused on our strategic objectives. We should be participative in our approach to management'. The senior management team are committed by the management approach to 'collective achievement of the strategy' and 'recognising the contribution our staff make to the achievement of our objectives'.

One last feature of the Grampian 10 year strategy for healthcare should be noted and that is that the two repertoires are again featured in the assessment of the practices. Despite the 'rationality' constructed in the strategy, because 'real performance' in the NHS is 'difficult to measure', after three years only two measures of performance are used by Fullerton¹⁰ and Price: waiting lists and mean waiting times. It is then argued that the 'real value' of the work lies in 'the fact that the momentum for change in Grampian is now self-renewing'.

The two repertoires also appear together in the 'reengineering' approach. Champy argues that the changing environment requires organizations to be 'reengineered'. Such organizations require:

¹⁰ Fullerton was General Manager of the Grampian Health Board

‘the expert all-rounder, the team player who can work alone, the good student with street smarts, the numbers person who speaks with eloquence, the people person who is also a technocrat, the self confident follower who is also a leader who listens’ (1995:156).

However, to recruit and retain workers with such attributes, organizations must change hiring processes, education processes and the terms on which workers and organizations work together. Companies will be able, and forced, to offer:

“No guarantees, but _____” contracts. The blank will then be filled in with all sorts of worthwhile *quids pro quo* - training, education, contracts, humane and interesting work, and so forth; plus salaries, profit sharing, stock options, and benefits’ (1995:176).

Another example where the repertoires combine can be found in Nixon (1989). He starts from a position of claiming success lies in ‘releasing’ the talents of people who:

‘increasingly believe that work should be fulfilling, exciting and fun and that it should offer opportunities for learning and growth. They believe their work should be qualitatively connected to the rest of their lives. They are less willing to tolerate the old, relatively oppressive styles of management’ (1989:14).

This is an example of repertoire B in which the solution lies in ‘leadership’ which can create a climate in which the best will be brought out of people. However, the contribution of expertise (through a training and development strategy) to help foster the leadership to create such a climate involves a diagnosis of the organizational environment, the problematizing the organization in that context, and decisions about key strategic individual interventions (repertoire A).

Further examples of texts in which the two repertoires appear alongside one another can be found in Stevens (1995), Bottomley (1983) and Peters (1987). Stevens begins by arguing that:

‘Relatively few statements can be made without fear of contradiction. But two come to mind: that the economies which are most successful are those which best harness the skills, knowledge and imagination of their people; and that the quality of people management and development is the key differentiating influence on organizational performance’ (1995:1).

These statements form the basis of an articulation of repertoire A (management/organization is the key factor) and repertoire B (the attributes of the

individuals require the organization to 'harness' them). Bottomley (1983) provides an example of repertoire B, in which the needs of the workforce are met through job design/enlargement/enrichment, and an example of repertoire A, in which Human Asset Accounting and organizational structuring can be used to assist the organization to adapt to economic, technical, and social change. Peters (1987) argues that the implicit and explicit theme of the prescriptions for a world turned upside down (many of which can be identified as following the logic of repertoire A) is 'through people' - which implies the logic of repertoire B:

'people *must* become the primary source of value added, not a "factor of production" to be optimized, minimized and/or eliminated' (1987:282).

In such texts statements from both repertoires are understood as axiomatic: they do not contradict one another because the problematizations are combined in the 'solution': - a rational strategy. Both repertoires problematize environment, organization and individuals and produce the solutions in terms of strategic HRM expertise. Problems and solutions are mutually constituted in a discourse in which the problems can only be solved by an increasingly programmatic approach. Such a duality in the construction of repertoires in discourse should not, then, be conceived of as linear: repertoires in discourse are entwined, entangled, and interconnected. They form a problematized space and a 'complex web of relays' (Miller and Rose 1990:19). Although the repertoires are 'separate' in the sense that they can be separately identified, this does not mean that accounts always follow the repertoires separately. Accounts can switch from one to another according to circumstances. Indeed, this ability to switch allows those operating within the discourse to avoid the cognitive dissonance which flows from explicit contradictions. The rationality constructed through the alignment of environment, organization and individual is, as Miller and Rose (1990) suggest, 'loose and approximate, and always mobile and indeterminate' because of 'change' - political, economic, social, or technological. Policies and practices can be explained by reference to either or both repertoires as circumstances require: although

discourse analysis cannot identify intentions there is no suggestion that either repertoire represents purposeful activity for the sole benefit of the workforce.

The discourse of the prescriptive literature utilizes both repertoires by problematizing the issue of the management of people in work organizations. From this 'rationalized', problematized space or 'web' in discourse strategic HRM expertise emerges, not as a particular set of policies and not as a definition, but first as a particular set of problematizations: the problematization of the organization in the environment and the problematization of the individual in the organization (both identified in repertoire A), and the problematization of the individual in the environment and the problematization of the organization in relation to the individual (both identified in repertoire B).

The environment is problematized as a rapidly changing 'out there' through which the organization must be strategically steered. The environment includes hostile entities (e.g. competitors, unions, regulatory authorities, etc.) and a market towards which the organization must move. The organization in the environment is problematized as hierarchical, bureaucratic, formal, distanced from customers, over-large, wasteful, rigid and inflexible, internally demarcated, lacking quality, over-rational, lacking leaders, non-responsive, and ill-equipped to utilize its most important resource. The individual in the organization is problematized as unempowered, inflexible, and a source of unrealized potential. The individual in the environment is problematized as not motivated, not committed, not customer facing, a dupe misinformed by unions, inflexible, etc. The construction of expertise in discourse provides the means for:

knowing environments, organizations, individuals and the relationships between them in this particular way:

aligning, ordering and integrating them:

problematizing them in a particular way: and,

solving the problems.

The solutions to these particular types of problems cannot be merely administrative, cannot be simply concerned with welfare, and are little concerned with IR. The problematizations of organizations and individuals are 'integrated' in discourse in the production of solutions by strategic expertise in programmatic approaches to the management and governance of people through 'discipline'. 'Old' personnel administration, welfare, and IR policies are not appropriate in the context of these problematizations because they do not have the scope to provide solutions: such problematizations suggest a strategic response. HRM 'knowledge' is constructed as expertise in a strategic discourse which continuously constitutes particular problems and solutions. The solutions are translated by the expertise into strategic policies and practices in a programmatic attempt to discipline and govern organizations and individuals.

'Strategy' in prescriptive management discourse identifies the organization and individuals as controllable and programmable. It identifies certain issues which can be solved by a programmatic approach: other management issues are devolved down the line while non-controllable factors are defined as environmental. 'Strategy' denotes the 'known' domain: as Miller and Rose argue, government only becomes possible:

'through discursive mechanisms that represent the domain to be governed as an intelligible field within its limits, characteristics whose component parts are linked together in some more or less systematic manner' (1990:6).

In producing and identifying the 'solvable', strategy becomes an object of faith around which there can be a consensus which can be supported by organizational participants. 'Strategy' is constructed in this way most clearly in the prescriptive HRM literature. For example (as noted previously), Walton argues for a commitment strategy, acknowledging the legitimate claims of a company's multiple 'stakeholders' (1985a:80), and for 'mutuality' - mutual goals, mutual influence, mutual respect, mutual rewards, mutual responsibility - that elicits commitment, better economic performance and greater human development' (Walton 1985b).

Similarly, Skinner uses the concept of 'trust'. He argues that the short time horizons of employees can conflict with the long-range goals of the corporation and that 'drawing connections between these sets of goals is not easy'. He suggests that 'effective relations between individuals and companies rest on employees' trust that the goals are connected' (1981:108).

The 'knowledge' in discourse on which 'discipline' is based is as much concerned with the routine as the novel. The management of people in work organizations has traditionally involved the keeping of records (application forms, holiday records, disciplinary records, sickness records, etc.) and the measurement of work (through time and motion, negotiation of piece-work rates and bonus schemes, etc.). In more recent constructions of expertise the means by which individuals can be known and recorded (psychometric testing, performance appraisals, assessment centres, competencies) are extended and go beyond administration into 'discipline'. Whatever the intentions of such methods, the effect is the introduction of more 'discipline' which orders and creates 'reality'.

Such 'disciplining' of individual workers in organizations is dependent upon 'knowledge' of work and individuals. The effects can be seen in terms of increasing moves towards outcomes being written into contracts or formalized in performance agreements and monitored through regular performance appraisals. The combination of 'discipline' and 'knowledge' enables practices such as self-management, self-appraisal, empowerment, and 'enterprise' (repertoire B) to be developed as methods of gaining the increased productivity and reduced costs required by organizations that have to change because of the changing environment (repertoire A). 'Discipline' and 'knowledge' are 'integrated' in programmatic expert attempts to govern organizations and individuals.

Expertise is a product of discourse but it is more than 'rhetoric' because it is also productive in that it can extend into new areas (e.g. to 'colonise' strategy) and away from

old practices (e.g. industrial relations). Hence, discipline, knowledge, and expertise are all connected with practice. 'Knowing' management within the discourse of HRM produces certain effects including 'knowing' policies as 'natural', 'normal', and 'rational'. Furthermore, 'rhetoric' is then combined with persuasion, intrigue, and calculation in the construction of allied interests; that is, in a process of *'interessement'* (Miller and Rose 1990:9). This process is at its most explicit in the prescriptive literature where trust, commitment and mutuality are emphasised.

Repertoire B can be understood as a variant of the 'Fitting the job to the man' slogan: the job (i.e. the organization) can be manipulated to address the needs of the individual as delivered by the environment. The individual may be understood as a problem (not committed, not motivated, etc.) or as a source of potential which needs to be harnessed. Repertoire A can be seen as an extended version of the 'fitting the man to the job' slogan: the individual must be adapted to the needs of the job, or organization, and the organization must be adapted to the needs of the environment. Repertoire B is as calculative as repertoire A in that it 'knows' people in such a way that they can be calculated rationally. It 'knows' people as motivated by rewards, as responsive to culture/communication initiatives, and as manageable towards providing competitive advantage. There are unitarist and pluralist versions in both repertoires and the repertoires are utilized in prescriptions at a variety of organizational levels.

Through the construction of these repertoires HRM expertise emerges as integrated, objective, rational, scientific, repositioned by strategy as important and necessary, repositioned as 'bottom-line' with individuals defined as a 'resource' (but with their interests aligned with those of the organization), and repositioned as 'new' (by prescriptive HRM) with 'new' policies and practices (whether or not these are identifiable as reconceptualized personnel policies and practices by external or alien discourses). HRM expertise is positioned by discourse as a specialised knowledge and, through policies and

practices, as a technology for mediating - programmatically - the relationships between environment, organization, and individuals. Such expert specialised knowledge links with other discourses, including discourses of excellence/enterprise, discourses of corporate strategy, and other areas of constantly developing 'scientific' and 'rational' expertise such as work psychology. However, such expertise does not emerge from the prescriptive literature as a fully defined academic subject, but as a discourse that is defined as it is produced and reproduced.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter the prescriptive management literature was analysed as a discourse in which solutions and problems are mutually constituted. From this perspective 'rationality' is understood as the 'internal logic' of a discourse which is constructed *by* that discourse. It was argued that in HRM discourse the three key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) are constructed, ordered and aligned in two 'repertoires'. The two 'repertoires' were identified on the basis of this ordering and alignment rather than on the basis of which component objects are constructed. In repertoire A the environment determines the organization which, in turn, determines the individuals. In repertoire B the environment determines the individuals and the individuals determine the organization.

Repertoire A: environment → organization → individual

Repertoire B: environment → individual → organization

The two repertoires were first examined individually and then together as they appear in discourse. Both repertoires are internally coherent, even from the perspective of an 'alien' epistemology, although they may appear to contradict each other. It was argued that within the discourse of the prescriptive management literature the 'repertoires' are complementary.

This approach to the analysis of discourse in terms of the construction of key 'objects' and their ordering and alignment in 'repertoires' will be used in Part II in the

examination and analysis of interviews with HR/personnel managers. However, the next chapter re-examines the ‘critical’ literature as a discourse which constructs HRM as an academic subject.

CHAPTER FOUR - THE CONSTRUCTION OF HRM AS AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT

This chapter starts from an earlier version of the ‘rhetoric/reality’ debate which suggests that HRM should be conceptualized as a particular kind of ‘construction’. The ‘critical’ HRM literature is used as an example of a discourse in which various definitional practices are involved in the construction of an academic subject called ‘HRM’. However, it is argued that the problems identified by the ‘critical’ literature stem from that approach being ‘self-referenced’ and ‘self-enclosed’. This particular construction of HRM by the ‘critical’ literature is important for, as Kamoche argues:

‘Some people formulate models of HRM, and on being unable subsequently to find these “in real life”, proceed to dismiss HRM as sheer rhetoric’ (1995:369).

This chapter argues that the construction of HRM as an academic subject by the ‘critical’ literature results in the construction of the ‘gap’ between ‘rhetoric’ and ‘reality’.

Behavioral Theory vs. reality

Lee (1971) sought to examine a phenomenon that is remarkably similar to the ‘rhetoric/reality’ distinction that is central to the ‘critical’ HRM literature. Lee’s conceptualization of HRM (or what he refers to as ‘Modern Human Resources Management’ - MHRM) is closer to what is now understood as ‘human relations’. It includes the work of ‘behavioral theorists’ such as McGregor, Herzberg, Argyris, and Maslow. However, he identifies a gap between behavioral theories and the ‘reality’ of management practice. Lee argued that:

‘Most behavioral theorists have “known” for years how an organization and its management style should be changed to bring about tremendous improvement in morale and productivity. Executives, managers and administrators who have been exposed to MHRM theories appear, at least to the theorists, to have adopted their “findings” almost not at all. And the question is: Why?’ (1971:20).

Lee’s answer to this question is intermingled with his advocacy for the MHRM approach. He details a number of reasons for the resistance to MHRM and argues that MHRM theories are ‘only descriptions’ of cultural changes in a few small subcultures

(1971:24-28). However, he goes on to answer his own question by claiming that ‘most MHRM theories...are self- and subculturally referenced’ (1971:28).

Continuing this debate, Nord (1974) follows a similar line in identifying a ‘gap’. In addressing the ‘failure’ of applied behavioral science from a Marxian perspective he argues that:

‘The crucial gap today between managerial practices and the humanistic values of applied behavioral scientists is to a considerable degree a result of their failure to consider socioeconomic variables and their effects on human behaviour’ (1974:557).

Nord goes on to argue that MHRM ‘comes close’ to paradigmatic status in terms of Kuhn’s (1962) concept of paradigms as models of reality which provide the basis for coherent bodies of scientific inquiry (Nord 1974:557-8). Nord emphasises the relationship between ‘the MHRM paradigm and the capitalist ideology of the United States’ (1974:575)¹¹.

In this chapter, the ‘critical’ HRM literature will be analysed as a ‘paradigm’ created by the ‘self- and subculturally referenced’ critical analysts in which a particular kind of academic subject called ‘HRM’ is created as a model which does not correspond with the analysts own model of ‘reality’. It is argued that the creation of this particular model also creates the ‘gap’ between rhetoric and reality. None of the processes involved is invalid within the terms of a positivist social science. However, the chapter aims to make those processes explicit.

The construction of HRM as an academic subject in the ‘critical’ literature

The definition of HRM is a particularly difficult issue because there are no authoritative and generally agreed definitions available. The first step in this analysis is to note that some definitions in the literature do attempt, as Blyton and Turnbull claim, to establish HRM as ‘a field of study rather than a field of management’ (1992:3). Blyton and

¹¹. Similarly, Guest (1990) argues that there is a relationship between HRM and the ‘American Dream’

Turnbull use the definitions provided by the editors of two HRM journals as examples of this practice (Sisson 1990, Poole 1990). However, there are a number of practices in the 'critical' literature which contribute towards attempts at objective definitions of HRM.

Definition is a perfectly legitimate analytical device: without a clear definition of a topic it is difficult to explain what it is that is being analysed. Nor is definition a practice exclusive to the 'critical' literature. However, the key issue in this section is the *particular* way that HRM is defined by the 'critical' literature because the product of the definitional practices is the particular definition of HRM which is then examined in terms of coherence and which is held up and compared with 'reality'. Therefore, it is the definition of HRM by the 'critical' literature in a particular way that creates both HRM as an academic subject and the 'gap' between 'rhetoric' and 'reality'. It will be shown that the 'critical' literature does not provide a 'neutral' definition of HRM but creates a particular version of HRM as an analytical subject which is then endlessly re-examined, deconstructed, debated, rejected, modified, and compared with a particular construction of 'reality'. These processes by which HRM is constructed by the 'critical' literature will now be examined to demonstrate that they do result in a *particular* construction. This particular construction has a great impact on the way that research into the management of people in work organizations is carried out in that management practices are understood as unconnected and *ad hoc* rather than integrated or strategic.

Definitions - What is HRM?

Several definitional processes can be identified in the 'critical' literature including extraction, delineation, the identification of 'types', the identification and selection of component parts, and the testing of coherence. In addition, in the definitional processes the 'critical' literature utilizes a particular definition of 'strategy'. These processes combine in the 'critical' literature to construct a distinctive definition of HRM as a suitable subject for

critical analysis. It is worth noting the contribution each definitional practice makes towards defining HRM, even where definition is not the stated aim.

(i) *Extraction*

Extraction involves extracting an understanding of what HRM is from key prescriptive texts such as Beer *et al* (1985), Walton (1985a), Tichy *et al* (1982) and Hendry and Pettigrew (1986). In extracting an understanding from prescriptive texts, certain key concepts are identified by the 'critical' literature - in particular, the linked concepts of 'integration' (or 'fit') and 'strategy'. It is not surprising that 'strategy' features so prominently because the literature works from definitions of 'strategic HRM' rather than definitions which include 'strategic' as one of the attributes of HRM. There is no doubt that these concepts do appear in the prescriptive literature which argues that HRM has strategic functions that should be integrated with business strategy (see for example, Tichy *et al* 1982), that HRM should be integrated with the organization's stage of development, and the components of HRM should fit with and support each other (e.g. Baird and Meshoulam 1988). From the process of extraction come actual definitions and approaches to questions about what kind of thing HRM is.

(ii) *Delineation*

Delineation refers to the process of differentiating HRM from prior or contemporary management approaches - particularly personnel management (see, for example, Guest 1991:151). However, the delineation of HRM from personnel is problematic because 'personnel' itself is in need of definition independently of HRM for delineation to be valid. As such an independent definition of personnel is not always available, HRM and personnel are defined in the same account. For example the 'broad, general (not to say idealized) perspective' on HRM identified by Beaumont depends, almost entirely, on a 'narrow' definition of personnel administration (1992:21); but this definitional practice appears to define personnel as narrow *in order* to define HRM as broad.

Delineation from personnel is only partially successful. It appears that for each defining feature of HRM, that same feature has been used in analysis and descriptions of, or prescriptions for, personnel management. Such continuities extend to the emphasis on 'strategy' and the critique of internal coherence (Legge 1978:37) and the identification of a gap between the 'theoretical centrality and frequently experienced marginality' of the personnel function (Gowler and Legge 1986:225).

(iii) *Different types*

The identification of different types of HRM contributes to the definition of HRM by *internally* delineating the concept into hard and soft versions (Storey 1989), loose and tight approaches (Keep 1989), or traditional, neo-pluralistic, strategic, and pluralistic-adversarial forms (Keenoy 1990a). Such processes of internal delineation also contribute to the definitional process by identifying the component parts of each type in order to compare and contrast them (see below). The concept is also sub-divided according to attributes, aspects (qualitative/calculative, etc.) and emphases (motivation/ leadership, etc.).

The delineation of American from British HRM (Legge 1989) is, as with the delineation of HRM from personnel, only partially successful. It has the effect of defining HRM in Britain as a pluralist, rather than unitary, approach: the pluralist approach is one of the defining features of personnel when normative models of HRM and personnel are compared. The distinction between American and British models of HRM is, in any case, not very distinct. The British definitions used by Legge are themselves derived from American definitions (Hendry and Pettigrew 1986:3, Guest 1987:504, see also Torrington 1989:56).

(iv) *Components*

The identification of component parts also involves the *selection* of component parts from what might be an inexhaustible list of possibilities provided by the literature or by managers. Although selection can follow from definition, in the 'critical' literature it

contributes to the definition. Two influential lists/sets of components are provided by Guest (1987) - who identifies component HRM 'goals' of integration, flexibility, commitment, and quality - and Storey (1989) - who identifies four key constitutive elements. This process is extended by the concept of 'bundles' of HRM practices (Guest 1996, Purcell 1996).

However, without the delineation from other approaches the issue of what is inside HRM and what is outside appears beyond resolution. The 'critical' literature is stuck between the maps, models and theories identified by Noon (1992). Any attempt at identifying a particular set of component parts cannot be 'objective'.

Storey provides a route around this problem by using a model derived from interviews with managers. He argues that this can be a reasonable academic process:

'what needs to be clarified is that the "idealized" [model] is not a prescription devised by the author but a representation made by reconstructing the implicit models of the managers interviewed' (1992, quoted in Storey 1995:25).

Such a process is justified by Storey who argues that 'the analyst who transforms the implicit statements of managers into a more explicit form cannot be criticised as if he is proselytizing these ideas' (1995:25). Yet it should be noted that the managers from whom his idealized model is gleaned are not necessarily HR managers:

'Much of the drive for HRM came in fact, not from personnel specialists, but from line and general managers. In some instances, HRM-type policies were pushed through despite the reluctance of personnel professions' (1995:7).

This implies that what counts as 'HRM-type policies' is already decided and that the implicit statements of line and general managers are not *transformed* into a model: they merely confirm a pre-existing model.

As with different types of HRM, the identification and selection of the component parts of HRM fills in the detail and further sub-divides the concept into elements, policies, practices, and goals. Each sub-division can be further sub-divided to provide finer detail. These subdivisions can then be utilized in the construction of HRM by defining which policies practices and goals make it up.

(v) *The coherence of HRM*

Coherence is one of the attributes of HRM that provides its 'novelty'. Coherence testing is less obviously a definitional process but it is important to the 'critical' literature in that it continues the process of defining HRM in a particular way and also defines the 'critical' literature as rigorous, rational, objective and academic. However, the examination is of HRM *as defined by the 'critical' literature* and is carried out in terms of concepts generated by the 'critical' literature. For example, Legge identifies a number of potential contradictions in the HRM model. In the process she operationalizes the definitional practices of the 'critical' literature and it is the product of those definitional practices that contains the contradictions.

While Keenoy similarly argues that there are 'incompatible dualistic imperatives' he contributes to the definitional practice of the 'critical' literature by identifying component parts. In order to emphasise contradiction he selects specific policies. Thus, as the 'critical' literature definition is built up from selected component parts, those component parts are identified as contradictory.

Coherence provides the 'novelty' of HRM which makes HRM a 'new' and interesting subject suitable for academic analysis. 'Strategy' and integration provide the links between policies that seem to promise the possibility of understanding HRM in terms of a general theory of employee management. However, this possibility vanishes because as HRM is identified as 'strategic' in this sense it is also identified as contradictory. As Legge argues:

'Ironically, it is the contradictions embedded in HRM that have facilitated the development of this rhetoric even if they simultaneously render strategic action problematic' (1989:40).

It appears that 'strategy' leads to contradictions, and the contradictions lead to 'rhetoric'.

The particular definition of ‘strategy’

As has been noted, concepts of ‘strategy’ and ‘integration’ are identified as central to the concept of HRM and then become central to the examination of HRM in terms of coherence in the ‘critical’ literature. The ‘critical’ literature has utilized a conceptualization of ‘strategy’ which appears to have its roots in the traditional (‘classical’/‘rational’) management science approach described in Chapter One. The emphasis on strategy and integration in the prescriptive HRM literature has been understood by the ‘critical’ literature to indicate that the HRM model should be consistent, internally coherent and complete. However, far from being the rational, coherent, tightly-defined concept implied by much of the ‘critical’ HRM literature, a discourse approach identifies ‘strategy’ as an elusive and constantly redefined concept which encompasses, for example, intended, emergent, realized, and unrealized strategies (Mintzberg, 1978); processual strategies and ‘reconstructions after the fact’ (Pettigrew, 1985:277); and evolving, incremental, consensual strategies, (Quinn, 1978, 1982).

The ‘critical’ literature, however, has continued to interpret the emphasis on strategy and integration in the prescriptive HRM literature as an indication that HRM is rational, coherent, and complete; that is, ‘strategic’ as conceptualized by the ‘classical’ management approach rather than the ‘processual’ approach (Whittington, 1993). This interpretation amounts to a prescription that HRM should be rational, coherent, and complete. It is these standards - the standards of the ‘critical’ literature and the ‘classical’ approach - that are sought and not found by empirical research. This interpretation follows that of Thurley and Wood who argue that:

‘Much of the corporate strategy literature certainly seems to assume an organizational rationality which most industrial relations practitioners and theorists would instinctively reject’ (1983:222).

This instinctive rejection leads Thurley and Wood to focus, not on the problems that may be caused by the imposition of their own definition of strategy, but on the problems for

analysts who may impute rationality and intention to managerial actions where none actually existed (1983:221).

It is the concept of the integration of HRM that is most dependent on a rationalist conceptualization of 'strategy'. As Legge argues:

'Arguably the act of *consciously* matching HRM policy to business strategy is only relevant if one adopts the rationalist "classical" perspective. From the point of view of the "processual" perspective there may be no clearly articulated business strategy with which to match HRM policy' (1995:103).

However, it is the strategic and integrated version of HRM that, despite the problems with its coherence, is compared with 'reality'. The tight, over-rational, *strategic* definition provided by the 'critical' literature excludes empirical findings of opportunistic or *ad hoc* policies from evidence for the existence of HRM - because they are not strategic. Therefore, by constructing a limited definition of strategic HRM which includes a 'rationalist' conceptualization of 'strategy', the range of possible empirical evidence for the existence of HRM is narrowed. Narrowing admissible evidence has the effect of defining the 'reality' against which the 'rhetoric' is evaluated. Changes which cannot be directly linked to this particular version of strategic HRM are excluded when empirical evidence for the existence of HRM is sought.

The implication of this is that, while little evidence of HRM is discovered, changes occur apparently without cause. Such 'causeless' change appears 'natural'. The narrow 'reality' defined by 'critical' HRM definitions then appears to be a 'natural' state of change. This 'natural' state may be characterized as chaotic and causeless, and it may feature opportunistic and *ad hoc* policies, but because it provides little evidence of 'strategy' it cannot evaluate the effect of HRM.

The consequence of an approach which uses a rationalist conceptualization of 'strategy' is that if HRM is not identifiably strategic, then it is discounted. Only tightly defined strategic (if incoherent) HRM is held up to be compared to a 'reality' that seems to consist of unconnected and *ad hoc* initiatives. The conclusion sets the research agenda:

HRM is opportunistic hype and the consequence is that the focus of research is directed to the analysis of individual management initiatives as *ad hoc*, disparate, discrete, and often contradictory policies brought together under the ‘umbrella’ of the HRM label.

Towards a new ‘critical’ approach to HRM

The vague and blurred general definition of HRM extracted from the prescriptive literature is given a sharper outline by delineating HRM from what it is not, and the definition is rationalized and idealized as the concept is divided and subdivided. Most importantly, through these processes, the ‘critical’ literature has defined, delineated, and built up a particular analytical subject of its own called ‘HRM’ which it then proceeds to problematize in terms of the correspondence between HRM and ‘reality’.

However, understanding HRM in this way, as merely the sum of its parts, leads to the *understating* of the impact HRM can have on the management of people in work organizations. By reducing HRM to a list of initiatives to be ticked off by empirical research, analysis is directed away from possible effects of HRM beyond the implementation of specific policies. Hence, the approach of the ‘critical’ literature to evaluating HRM is limited by its particular, rational definition and understanding of HRM because the definitional practices involved in the creation of HRM as an analytical subject define and delineate, not only HRM, but also what would count as evidence of the existence of HRM in ‘reality’ - lists, bundles, sets, etc.

Concern with definition in order to make HRM a suitable subject for traditional analytical endeavour results in the construction of a traditional analytical subject - not necessarily in the analysis of HRM. The problem, then, identified by the ‘critical’ literature appears to be a ‘gap’ between the HRM ‘rhetoric’ and the ‘reality’. This implies a problem for HRM itself. However, the problem outlined above indicates a *definitional* issue which is a problem for the ‘critical’ literature rather than HRM itself. The *definitional* problem is a consequence of ‘traditional’ approaches such as that described by Wood (1989) who argues

that the 'challenge' will be to 'first devise criteria and methods by which we can evaluate them' (1989:401).

The problem for the 'critical' literature is that a tight definition of HRM which identifies HRM as a new and distinct academic subject appears to exclude empirical evidence of HRM in 'reality'. A looser definition of HRM may be at risk of including everything - which would fail in that it could not identify HRM as a new and distinct subject for academic investigation. This chapter has identified definitional practices as the key issue for the 'critical' literature, but one that cannot be resolved. The identification of definitional issues as the key problem leads back to the question of how HRM might be analysed if it cannot be defined. It is difficult to see how the approach informed by the 'critical' literature might resolve this recurring problem - or how critical analysis might progress and develop further except through the continuing subdivision and fragmentation of the HRM concept that characterizes current debates.

An alternative approach to understanding HRM is provided by Keenoy who argues that:

'HRM could be seen as a rhetoric intended to reconstruct the motivation to work and relegitimise managerial authority in the employment relationship in terms of the new morality implicit in the political solution devised to deal with the crisis of the early 1980s. More specifically, I want to suggest that, far from indicating a new era of *humane* people oriented employment management, that the *primary purpose* of the rhetoric of HRM might be to provide a legitimacy managerial ideology to facilitate an intensification of work and an increase in the commodification of labour - both of which can be regarded as part of the "solution" to the crisis' (1990b:375, *emphasis in original*).

This is to suggest that the key definitional question 'what is HRM?' should be replaced by the question 'what is HRM for?'; i.e. what is the *primary purpose* of HRM? The 'critical' literature has identified HRM from the prescriptive literature, has then constructed its own version in the form of an academic subject, and has 'critically examined' that version. Keenoy's concept of a *primary purpose* suggests that there is an entirely different HRM agenda. Keenoy and Anthony develop this approach and suggest that:

‘empirical refutation of the claims of HRM is of marginal relevance to the cultural impact of HRM for...much of the real debate about HRM and the reconstruction of the employment relationship has been conducted through rhetoric and metaphor. In other words, the “empirical reality” that must be penetrated before we can come to a properly informed understanding of the nature of HRM is what might be called the internal logic of the histrionics of HRM’ (1992:235).

The ‘primary purpose’ of this HRM agenda, then, might be accessed through an analysis of the internal logic of HRM. The problem arising from such an approach is that the internal logic may not correspond to the standards of logic accepted by the ‘critical’ literature. Nonetheless, Keenoy and Anthony do point the way to a different conceptualization of HRM when they argue:

‘A precise, coherent and internally consistent definition would be dysfunctional: HRM does not start with a set of policy objectives but with a mission statement’ (1992:238).

From such a perspective, it is precisely the lack of clarity over the definition of HRM - which Keenoy refers to as the ‘brilliant ambiguity’ of HRM - which needs to be examined. Definitional exercises obscure the ‘brilliant ambiguity’ in the attempt to make HRM a suitable subject for traditional, critical analysis. Legge (1995) follows the lead of Keenoy and Anthony in searching for an alternative to the positivist epistemology of the ‘critical’ literature and notes that:

‘from a postmodernist perspective it is inappropriate to regard rhetoric as somehow separate from or lesser than the “real” world: rhetoric is the real world’ (1995b:85).

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter started with an earlier version of the ‘rhetoric/reality’ debate and suggests that ‘critical’ HRM literature is ‘self- and sub-culturally referenced’ (Lee 1971:28). The chapter provided a re-examination of the ‘critical’ HRM literature focusing on the definitional practices which, it was argued, discursively construct a *particular* ‘critical’ version of HRM. The chapter argued that the conclusion of the ‘critical’ approach - that HRM is incoherent ‘rhetoric’ that does not correspond with ‘reality’ - is a product of those particular positivist definitional practices which themselves create the ‘gap’ between

‘rhetoric’ and ‘reality’ and limit the possibility of finding ‘strategic’ HRM. The consequence is that the focus of research is directed to the analysis of individual management initiatives as *ad hoc*, disparate, discrete, and often contradictory policies brought together under the ‘umbrella’ of HRM.

However, some ‘critical’ HRM writers have questioned the positivist approach and have looked to postmodernist perspectives which suggest that ‘rhetoric’ is ‘reality’. This thesis follows on from this position by using the alternative perspective on strategic HRM drawn from a Foucauldian conceptualization of ‘discourse’ to examine and analyse transcripts of interviews with HR/personnel managers. From this alternative perspective ‘rationality’ is seen as discursively constructed by actors as they ‘make sense’ of their own discursively constructed organizational ‘reality’.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF PART I

Chapter One reviewed a wide range of literature concerned with HRM. HRM initially appears to be a useful concept. However, it has been critiqued by the ‘critical’ literature on the basis of its lack of internal coherence and the ‘gap’ between the ‘rhetoric’ and the ‘reality’. The consequence of this approach is that the ‘critical’ analysis of ‘strategy’ and ‘HRM’ is directed towards the study of individual, disparate, discrete and *ad hoc* management policies drawn together under the label ‘HRM’ which then functions as an ‘umbrella term’ (Blyton and Turnbull 1992:viii). Empirical evidence suggests an enterprise-by-enterprise approach is the most appropriate method for such studies.

The main purpose of Part I has been to explore an alternative approach to the study of HRM which understands management initiatives as more than merely *ad hoc*. From an alternative approach described in Chapter Two both ‘strategy’ and ‘HRM’ were reconceptualized, or ‘theorized’, in such a way as to move the debates on past the unresolvable issue of what the definitions *are* to the issue of *how* the definitions are constructed. Chapter Two reviewed Foucauldian-inspired approaches to the analysis of the management of people in work organizations and described the Foucauldian conceptualization of ‘discourse’. It discussed how ‘discourse’ might be utilized in an analysis of HRM. It was argued that ‘strategy’ and ‘HRM’ should be regarded, not as neutral ‘tools’ for analysis, but as products of discourse and, therefore, as ‘topics’ of analysis in need of investigation and explanation. The chapter identified three key ‘objects’ (environment, organization, individual) and argued that, in the prescriptive literature, these were ordered and aligned in two different ‘specific rationalities’ which establish causal relationships.

Chapter Three provided a re-examination of prescriptive management literature using this discourse approach to demonstrate how analysis can proceed. It was argued that HRM discourse can be understood as a discursive construction in which the key ‘objects’

are constructed and then ordered and aligned in 'repertoires' which indicate 'specific rationalities'. The 'repertoires' were distinguished on the basis of the ordering of 'objects' in causal relationships (Repertoire A = environment → organization → individual, Repertoire B = environment → individual → organization). The construction of the repertoires was illustrated with examples from the literature. The re-examination of the prescriptive literature will be utilized as a guide to the examination and analysis of interviews with managers in Part II.

Chapter Four argued that the difficulties of the 'critical' literature are a consequence of the methodology which that approach utilizes. It was argued that 'HRM' should be conceptualized as *constructed* in a particular way by the 'critical' literature. An earlier version of the HRM 'rhetoric/reality' debate was used to illustrate that the problems with the 'critical' HRM literature stem from it being 'self- and sub-culturally referenced' (Lee 1971:28). It was argued that the 'critical' literature has defined HRM as a traditional academic subject and then utilized a traditional analytical approach involving critique and comparison with 'reality'. This construction of HRM by the 'critical' literature leads to the conclusion that HRM is opportunistic hype: the consequence is that the focus of research is directed to the analysis of individual management initiatives as *ad hoc*, disparate, discrete, and often contradictory policies brought together under the 'umbrella' of HRM.

The major implication of the alternative discourse approach to HRM is that, unlike the current 'critical' literature which encourages the further subdivision and fragmentation of concepts, the research focus turns to an analysis of how apparently discrete, disparate, individual, and *ad hoc* management practices are connected.

This means that the apparently partial and uneven impact of HRM can be evaluated in terms of the effects of a discourse that produces a 'reality' in which concepts, knowledge, power, rationality, problematizations, policies, practices, and subjectivities, are created and

inextricably linked. Understanding strategic HRM and strategy in terms of ‘discourse’ provides a means of understanding the unity and cohesion articulated in ‘repertoires’.

Part II examines transcripts of interviews with managers and argues that the processes of construction through which apparently *ad hoc* management initiatives are connected can be seen as processes of alignment and ordering of key ‘objects’ in the two interrelated ‘repertoires’ (A and B) identified in the prescriptive literature. It is argued that these processes construct ‘rationality’ and ‘reality’ for those using the discourse and for those subject to the discourse.

PART II - RESEARCH REPORT

Introduction - Managers and discourse

In the following chapters the framework for analysing 'HRM discourse' that was developed in Part I is used to examine and analyse interviews with HR/personnel managers¹². The analysis focuses on the extent to which management initiatives are constructed by managers in these interviews as either *ad hoc* and individual or, in some way, connected. There are two main aims to this research: first, to establish whether the transcripts of interviews with managers can be understood as replicating the processes of 'object' and 'repertoire' construction that have been identified in the prescriptive literature; and, second, to identify the effect of such processes of discursive construction. It is argued that this discourse analysis approach can accommodate the variety found in organizational reality and can identify common practices across organizations.

In Chapters Five and Six interviews with HR/personnel managers working in the private sector are analysed in two stages to reflect the dual processes of 'object' and 'repertoire' construction. Chapter Five focuses on the first stage: the construction of 'objects' (environment, organization, individual). In Chapter Six, the focus turns to the second stage: the alignment and ordering of those objects in the two 'repertoires' (Repertoire A = environment → organization → individual, Repertoire B = environment → individual → organization). The 'repertoires' are understood as examples of the construction of 'specific rationalities'.

¹² In this analysis the term 'HR/personnel managers' includes personnel managers, HR managers, training and HRD managers. Some interviewees had 'director' or 'officer' rather than 'manager' in their job titles.

Chapter Seven similarly examines interviews with public sector HR/personnel managers in two stages. However, the chapter opens with a section on how the distinction between the private and public sectors is itself constructed in discourse by public sector managers. It is argued that this distinction dominates public sector discourse, although it rarely appears in private sector discourse. The dominance of the private/public split, and its implications throughout the construction of objects in public sector discourse, is the reason for separate examination of the two sectors.

An analysis of interviews with non-HR/personnel managers from private and public sectors is provided in Appendix II. These are the non-experts with regard to the management of people in work organizations, but they do manage people. To avoid repetition Appendix II does not examine the construction of objects but focuses solely on repertoire construction.

The examples of discourse provided by the managers cannot be simply 'read off' from the discourse constructed in the prescriptive literature: as Willmott argues, the prescriptive literature does not produce the practices it describes (1993:518). However, these chapters demonstrate that the interviews with managers can be understood in terms of the two 'repertoires' which were identified in the analysis of the prescriptive literature. It is argued that the process of the ordering and alignment of the three key objects constructs 'rationality' and, furthermore, that the use of more than one repertoire within one interview (i.e. the key objects being ordered in different ways within the same interview) indicates that more than one 'rationality' is being constructed in that example of discourse. While the variety in the construction of the key objects suggests that HRM discourse is organizationally specific, understanding these interviews in terms of the two 'repertoires' means that discursive practices can be identified which are common across the different organizations. The use of 'repertoires' indicates the means by which apparently *ad hoc*

management initiatives are connected 'rationally' in the process of the alignment and ordering of key objects.

Such processes similarly impact on the way that 'reality' is constructed. As Kamoche argues, 'social reality is constituted in the use of language...language is the objectification of reality'(1995:368). The focus in Part II is, therefore, on the language of managers for, as Mangham argues:

'some social actors are in a position to "produce reality" in that they can command resources which strongly influence the definitions held by other actors' (1986:55).

In this analysis managers are understood to be key 'social actors' who not only 'produce reality' in discourse, but also produce and sustain the positions from which they 'produce reality'. It is argued that the construction, alignment and ordering of the objects in management discourse indicates that the language of managers represents what Keenoy and Anthony term a 'medium for the nurturing of a new "reality"' (1992:249). The language of managers is understood, not as 'rhetoric' that does not match 'reality', but as a definitional resource that is used to construct reality for the managers and the managed, and to locate those social actors within that 'reality'.

'Tales' of management

In the prescriptive and analytical literature there are frequent references to the importance to management of various narrative forms. For example, Peters and Waterman (1982) and Peters and Austin (1985) emphasise the importance of 'stories', 'myths' and 'legends'; Mumby (1988) identifies 'storytelling' in organizations as a 'political act'; Guest (1990) identifies the myths and legends associated with HRM as significant to a new articulation of the 'American Dream'; Keenoy and Anthony (1992) argue that HRM can be understood as comprised of a series of metaphors; Watson argues that stories are 'fundamental to human processes of making sense of the world' (1994a:113). Jeffcutt (1994) employs a different approach in which he identifies a number of different 'tales' ('practitioner tales', 'travellers tales', 'researcher tales', 'heroic tales', 'cautionary tales',

etc.). He examines these tales in terms of the representative styles employed by organizational interpreters. Jeffcutt argues that:

‘In this narrative form, a heroic figure (the questor) undertakes an arduous journey towards a compelling but forbidding objective. The quest can thus be understood as a heroic process of passage through which the questor, and their world, becomes reordered and reformed’ (1994:229).

This report uses the term ‘tales’ in a particular way to describe the language used by managers. Unlike written text which is ‘goal-directed’ in arguing a particular point, or set of points, these managers were responding to questions and their answers form a series of sub-sections within the ‘grand narrative’ of the complete interview. These sub-sections are referred to as management ‘tales’ because managers often utilize linguistic devices akin to storytelling in their answers to questions - particularly when talking of the past.

Managers did not talk solely in ‘tales’. However, in the course of post interview coding, during which the sub-sections were isolated, it became apparent that managers provided explanation and justification for the management initiatives, not by reference to ‘best practice’, but by *telling* of experiences - of their own, of other social actors in the environment, of organizations - through a variety of linguistic devices which contextualized and illustrated their answers. These subsections not only provide a report of events but contain a point - a moral - which is revealed to justify or legitimate some practice or decision. The revealing of the moral gives these sub-sections a tale-like quality. Although not every sub-section had this quality, the term ‘tale’ is used as a form of shorthand that also serves to emphasise that these are not parts of pre-prepared texts but are spoken responses to questions. A large number of these ‘tales’ provided anecdotal ‘evidence’: they include what may be seen as myths, legends, fables, yarns, illustrative stories (e.g. ‘*you know, Joe tells Harry, Harry tells Bill...*’), reported or imaginary quotations, questions or speeches (e.g. ‘*I have said to them “If you believe...”*’), apocryphal stories, or perhaps fictions. No attempt is made to establish externally the ‘truth’ of these ‘tales’ for they are understood as part of a discourse which establishes the ‘truth’ for the speaker. Many such

'tales' are identified in the interviews and it is argued that, through these 'tales', the three key objects (environment, organization, individual) are constructed. Furthermore, the storytellers construct themselves as objective, expert, and 'distanced'.

Distancing

A second feature of the interviews with managers was the practice of 'distancing'. 'Distancing' has a similar definitional function to that of 'strategy' in the prescriptive literature: it defines the controllable and the uncontrollable. Keenoy and Anthony argue that:

'Managerial responsibility is divorced from both managerial action and sentiment and located in the natural hurricane of the "free market"...this distancing of managerial responsibility from the outcomes of HR policies is also reflected in the particular practices which have come to be associated with HRM. In general what they seek to do is to incorporate responsibility for outcomes into the performance of the individual employee' (1992:245).

Similarly, Anthony (1986) suggests that management in Great Britain is engaged in a 'long retreat' from responsibility for the control and direction of labour. He argues that:

'this refusal to manage has been carried out by persistent and deliberate strategies of avoidance accompanied by equally deliberate obfuscations which have had the effect of distracting attention from management's failure' (1986:1).

Knights and Morgan also argue that 'mistakes and failures are relegated to the status of minor tactics and attributed to weaknesses in the organization' (1990:480). Such 'avoidance' and 'relegation' of failure will be referred to in the analysis as 'distancing'.

In the analysis of interviews with HR/personnel managers the term 'distancing' indicates the way that managerial responsibility is 'distanced' from the consequences of managerial initiatives and it appears to be most regularly associated with repertoire A (i.e. the uncontrollable environment necessitates an organizational response and that organizational response necessitates changes to/by individuals). 'Distancing' can also be understood as the corollary of 'ownership' - although 'ownership' only featured implicitly in the interviews. 'Distancing' positions the manager in relation to a variety of social actors, practices, and knowledges. 'Distancing' also allows the tellers of 'tales' to construct

themselves as objective and expert. The concept of ‘distancing’ will be further elaborated in the course of the analysis by using examples from the interviews with managers.

The HRM/Personnel distinction

This thesis has already argued that the distinction between HRM and personnel is a distinction that is constructed in discourse. However, the analysis of discourse does not attempt to adjudicate between rival claims but is more concerned with the effect of an object being defined in a certain way. As an analytical approach, the HRM/personnel distinction prejudices research into the discourse of managers and will be set to one side. The question ‘what is the difference between HRM and personnel?’ was directly addressed in the interviews - but not with the intention of finding an authoritative definition. Rather, it was asked in order to examine how managers construct and locate their role and the position and authority of various management initiatives. As with ‘distancing’ the distinction between HRM and personnel is used by managers as a positioning device.

Repertoire construction

Understanding HRM discourse in terms of the two ‘repertoires’ is an important feature of this approach (Repertoire A = environment → organization → individual, Repertoire B = environment → individual → organization). It is argued that the ordering and alignment of the three key ‘objects’ in causal relationships constructs ‘rationality’ and ‘reality’. This suggests that HRM discourse can be understood in terms of an expertise concerned with a connected and interrelated group of policies and practices rather than an unconnected grouping of individual and *ad hoc* initiatives.

It is argued that such a construction provides the conditions of possibility for the introduction of particular approaches to the management of people in work organizations in terms of policies and practices, and sets or groups of policies and practices. The relationships between the key objects are presented in discourse as ‘natural’, and there is an ‘eternal optimism’ that these relationships can be mediated by management through

HR/personnel policies and practices operating in a 'scientific', 'objective', and programmatic manner. Through the processes of discourse construction there is a problematization of organizations and individuals in environments in which the 'rational' identification of the 'natural' or inevitable (over which there is no control) and the 'strategic' (the controllable) provides the basis for programmatic attempts to manage people at work.

The focus of the research

Part I provided a review and critique of existing approaches to the 'critical' study of strategic HRM/personnel and explored the possibility of an alternative approach. Part II uses that alternative approach in an examination and analysis of interviews with managers.

The key issue to be addressed in Part II is whether strategic HRM/personnel can be usefully conceptualized in terms of 'discourse'. The research investigates how interviews with managers can be understood in terms of 'discourse'. This involves exploring how discourse, 'rationality' and 'reality' are constructed as the key 'objects' are aligned and ordered in causal relationships (in 'repertoires').

The main contribution of this approach is that it conceptualizes management initiatives as connected through discursive practice. The identification of these connections between initiatives - which have been seen by 'traditional' approaches as individual, discrete, *ad hoc* and contradictory - provides a means of assessing the impact of key concepts (such as 'strategy' and 'HRM') and the effects of the construction of a strategic HRM discourse.

This approach does not 'solve' the 'rhetoric/reality' problem identified by the critical HRM literature, but argues that it is a problem constructed by that body of literature during the process of constructing HRM as an academic subject. Similarly, this approach does not 'solve' the issue of the relationship between HRM and personnel. It is argued that this is a distinction constructed in different ways in different discourses. The implications of the

construction of such a distinction in the interviews with managers are discussed in the analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE - DISCOURSE AND PRIVATE SECTOR HR/PERSONNEL MANAGERS

In this chapter the focus is on private sector management discourse. The chapter describes the construction of the key objects of discourse through various ‘tales’ told by managers. As will be demonstrated, in these interviews managers do appear to be telling a number of interconnected story-like ‘tales’, which can take the form of anecdotes, metaphors, and/or myths and can utilize numerous rhetorical devices. No assessment will be made of the ‘truth’ of these ‘tales’ from any ‘external’ perspective for the important point to establish at this stage is that in these ‘tales’ managers construct the key objects (environment, organization, individual) in a variety of ways from a variety of different perspectives. The next chapter focuses on the construction of repertoires in which the key objects are aligned and ordered into ‘specific rationalities’ that render ‘reality’ programmable and demonstrates that, despite the variety found in the construction of objects, there are common processes of repertoire construction.

The Participants

Biscuits	- Company Employee Relations Manager - Male
Bio-Tech Screens	- Head of Human Resources - Male
Safety	- Head of Personnel and Training - Male
Import Motors	- Personnel Manager - Female
Easyway	- Personnel Manager - Female
XYZ News	- Director of Human Resources - Male
Brokers	- Director of Human Resource Development - Male
RRM	- Personnel Consultant - Male

Usually, a research report provides brief descriptions of participating organizations. However, this seems an appropriate point to introduce some examples of discourse and let the interviewees explain what their organizations mainly make or do.

We manufacture, market and sell...Biscuits. (Biscuits - Company Employee Relations Manager - Male)

...the leading natural products drugs discovery company in the world.... (Bio-Tech Screens - Head of Human Resources - Male)

...we mainly make fire extinguishers and we sell them...in the United Kingdom. (Safety - Head of Personnel and Training - Male)

...importers of...vehicles....an administrative-type set-up... (Import Motors - Personnel Manager - Female)

We are a direct sales organization, and our main products are household...products. We do a very large range but that is probably what we are best known for. (Easyway - Personnel Manager - Female)

modern 24-hour news organization. (XYZ News - Director of Human Resources - Male)

It's an...insurance broking and risk management consultancy organization which means that we are intermediaries. We sit in between clients and the insurance markets - the insurance companies...So we are a financial services organization... (Brokers - Director of Human Resource Development - Male)

We are a marketing company. But in this location...it is predominately telephone marketing. So if you went upstairs you would see a call centre with 100 operators taking incoming calls. So it's a response mechanism from, say, a TV advert or a newspaper advert, and that call centre is open 24 hours, 7 days a week... (RRM - Personnel Consultant - Male)

The construction of objects in the private sector

In this chapter a selection of the 'tales' told by HR/personnel managers are grouped under a number of general headings. The selection and grouping of 'tales' in this way is not intended to show that all HR/personnel managers tell the same 'tales', but to emphasize the variety which illustrates the specificity of organizational 'reality'. The variety in the 'tales' is important because it illustrates why arguments that research should be carried out on an enterprise-by-enterprise basis are so plausible. The variety found by empirical research guided by 'traditional' approaches appears to deny the possibility of finding common features across more than a few organizations. Similarly, the variety of object construction in 'tales' illustrates why the search for strategy/HRM in the 'critical' literature has been generally unfruitful - the variety of conceptualizations found by empirical research appears to deny the possibility of definitions any more rigorous than the mere 'grouping' described

in this chapter. However, the key argument discussed in the next chapter is that this variety can be understood in terms of 'repertoires' in which relationships between these 'objects' are established. This requires that the key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) are constructed in HRM/personnel discourse in a particular way so that they are 'known' by HR/personnel managers as 'programmable' within the 'repertoires'. The construction of objects in a particular way in 'tales' also constructs a particular 'reality' in that:

'the condition that programmatic knowledge must satisfy is that it renders reality in the form of an object which is *programmable*' (Gordon 1980:248).

Such issues guide the description of 'tale' construction in this section. The aim is to demonstrate the construction of particular types of objects despite the variety of the 'tales'. It is argued that the key objects are constructed from many different perspectives in these 'tales'. Three of the 'tales' (of environment, of organization, of people) explicitly address the key objects. The term 'people' rather than 'individual' is used for these 'tales' in order to reflect the terminology used by the interviewees. Several different types of 'tale' are identified. Although it would be possible to compress these into the descriptions of the 'tales' of environment, organization, and people, so that they correspond to the three key objects, to do so would result in losing some of the variety and richness. Furthermore, many of the tales - including the 'tales' of environment, organization and people - contribute to the construction of more than one key object and, at this preliminary stage, division is preferred to conflation so that the tales can function as 'raw data'. This abstraction of individual 'tales' is, however, a presentational device: in discourse the 'tales' are interconnected (tales of the past with tales of unions, tales of unions with tales of new technology, etc.) while causal relations between the key objects are established in the 'repertoires' identified in the next chapter.

As Potter and Wetherell note, this type of discourse analysis requires a longer analytical section than the corresponding section of a traditional empirical report because a representative set of examples must be included (1987:172). In this report this chapter on

'tales' provides the evidence for the conclusions. For reasons of space, then, the numbers of type of 'tale' has been reduced rather than cutting down on examples from each selected 'tale': to do otherwise would obscure the variety. Tales excluded by the selection process have been incorporated, where possible, as part of general discussions. This type of research is not concerned with numbers as such but the selection of 'tales' to be included in this report was made on the basis of there being sufficient examples from different organizations to allow comparison and to illustrate variety. Some 'tales', therefore, were excluded simply because there were few instances of their articulation.

The 'tales' were not told in response to any particular questions, but were identified in post-interview coding carried out for the purpose of comparisons between organizations. The 'tales' were told as part of general discussions about the challenges currently facing organizations, and the responses of organizations to those challenges. Coding was carried out in an inclusive manner so that 'borderline' cases were not missed. (Further discussion of interviewing, coding, etc. can be found in Appendix I.)

(i) Tales of the past

Historical accounts or reference to the past featured in most of the private sector HR/personnel interviews. These 'tales' of the past have various effects and function as histories of the present; that is, they are part of explanations of why things are as they are in the present or as they will be in the future. In as much as they are 'contextual' they contribute to the construction of the key object 'environment', but as they provide histories of the organization, people and policies, 'tales' of the past contribute to all the key objects. 'Knowing' the past through such a construction constitutes problems and solutions in that managers can articulate how things were done and how things should and should not be done; they catalogue mistakes and errors, good and bad practices, immaturities and circumstance. The benefit of hindsight allows the speakers to position themselves as all-knowing experts who can disclose the 'truth' of what happened. From the vantage point of

the present the past can be told and retold (or rewritten) to suit the needs of the present and to facilitate change (see Kanter 1987). The 'tales' of the past are particularly important to the way that 'repertoires' are constructed because they indicate how connections and relationships between objects are understood by participants who have the benefit of hindsight. This allows them to articulate a rational reconstruction of events, including causes and effects. In the retold past of the 'tales' the key objects can be constructed in such a way to show that the changed present is an improvement giving rise to the eternal optimism that the improvements can be ongoing: there is little evidence of nostalgia in 'tales' of the past.

Tales of the past emphasise the importance of 'change'. For example, at RRM a brief and simple '*classic*' account of how the industry was divided in the past provides the rationale for a current 'integrated product' approach:

QA: In marketing you have this classic thing called 'above the line' and 'below the line' marketing...We traditionally have been known as a 'below the line' agency for a long time. All those boundaries are now fading into one. And now if somebody said to me 'What do you actually do as a company?' I would say we are a marketing company. (RRM:4)

The 'tale' of the past is important in this interview because, as will be shown in subsequent 'tales', the cause of organizational change is located outside the organization, and the past - in the form of 'tradition' - is dropped in the process of repositioning the '*below-the-line-agency*' as a '*marketing company*'.

A more extensive historical account came from the Director of HR Development at Brokers - '*we go back to 1828, so do a lot of our competitors*'. This account provides a problematization in terms of the need for a organizational transition from a '*highly traditional institution*' into '*a more professional, more like a consultancy practice organization*'. There is a description of the old market and a description of a profits crisis:

UA: one time we could rely on inefficiencies in the insurance market to provide us with a very good income (Brokers:2)

UA: ...we have suffered over the last several years, falling profitability, diminishing profitability...the insurance markets have been very soft, which means the commission

rates have been pretty low historically...the big change came last year. We had a crisis in the first quarter of last year and we had a moderately good 1993 in financial results, 1994 we posted first quarter results which were down on 1993. Stock Market, well the analysts, went berserk. They didn't like it, we suddenly lost credibility, our share price halved - in about 3 months our share price had halved - the sector went down generally speaking but our share price halved...That, if you like, was a kind of crisis event at the end of a long-term period of turmoil, which could be traced back to that first merger of 1987.
(Brokers:3)

A second historical account describes two mergers (in 1987 and 1990), the first of which was considered *'very unsuccessful'* and the second *'moderately successful'*. The mergers have meant that the number of shareholders has increased and profits and dividends have been going down. This has lead to *'huge pressure'* to maintain dividend in a highly competitive market.

At a later stage in the interview he suggests that he has not provided *'the whole story'*. This leads to an account of a succession crisis. Someone who had been identified as a successor to a key executive *'failed, and was seen to have failed'*. This provides the rationale for an argument that *'Human resources strategy needs to be a good distance away...five years is a reasonable time span to go on'*. In addition, this disclosure of failure *'distances'* succession policies from failure by attaching it to a particular individual.

There are three interrelated *'tales'* of the past, then, which can be identified in the interview at Brokers - a *'profits crisis'*, mergers that failed, and an individual who failed. These three establish a starting point for a construction of the key objects and the relationships between them in the present.

In two organizations - Bio-Tech Screens and Easyway - there are *'heroic'* tales of the *'founders'*. These are used to explain the way the companies have developed. At Bio-Tech Screens:

GA: *I think our founder was an incredibly good networker among scientists and therefore, right from the beginning, the culture has always been to look for the most efficient way of networking and getting the resource that you need.* (Bio-Tech Screens/a:6)

The abilities of the founder to get the required resource is particularly relevant to Bio-Tech Screens because they are using investors' money. This is emphasised in a cautionary tale of failed competitors:

GA: *...we've seen quite a few bio-techs in the early 80's come unstuck by getting a tranche of money and then going out and recruiting skills then realising a year or two later that, actually, their scientific direction has changed, and therefore, these people, they don't need them any more...* (Bio-Tech Screens/a:3).

The key contribution of 'tales' of the past at Bio-Tech Screens is the construction of the environment as potentially hostile to bio-tech companies, the organization as dependent on those outside the company (investors and partner companies) and on the particular qualities or attributes of the founder. This 'tale' also constructs a role for HRM (in terms of 'matching').

At Easyway the personnel manager felt that the way in which the organization had been built by the founders was significant and that their influence could still be felt:

PA: *We have an organization behind us who are still run by the family who founded this organization...the 2 guys who founded it are still in charge. And I think we are very fortunate that they built their business based on people - because of direct selling and distributors are people who want to make money and become entrepreneurs - and I think we are very fortunate that that filters through to our employees within our organization...*(Easyway/a:12)

This is supplemented by a 'cautionary' tale of the past which describes what happened when the general manager left Easyway. The replacement was also responsible for the whole of the European operation and was not always in the UK. This meant that Easyway was being run '*almost run by committee*' for about six months which was '*unsettling*' for everybody concerned: '*we weren't quite certain where things were going*'. The key point is that Easyway lacked direction: '*Somebody at some point has got to say "Right. We will do it this way". And so I think we struggled quite a bit...*'. These 'tales' of the past, then, construct leadership as an organizational imperative for Easyway. Leadership is important at Easyway because so much depends on the 'culture' of the organization, and this depends on senior management (see tales of organization below).

At Safety, the business environment in the recent past had clearly had an impact on the organization:

HA: *...We've been through a recession and the industry has contracted as a result of that recession. Obviously some businesses and factories have closed due to recession and of course the extinguishers go out the door and we lose our contracts...* (Safety:4).

However, the key effects of the past were felt in the impact of poor management decisions, particularly decisions about recruitment which, historically, had been undertaken by local management.

HA: *...What has happened in the past is that some of the decisions have been poor decisions in the quality of people they have taken on, and therefore within a few months, six months or whatever, people could be leaving.* (Safety:2)

Training had also been out in the field and had been '*too loose*'. This provides the rationale for policies aimed at improved recruitment and training procedures through the centralization of these practices. The construction of the problem as being too loose out in the field constructs the solution of centralization. The 'tale' of the past at Safety includes disclosure of failings at an individual and an organizational level as well as suggestions that training had been misused (see 'tales' of training).

At Import Motors the personnel manager made little direct reference to the past but related what was happening in the present to the way things used to be. This was a rare example of presenting the past in terms of the 'good old days': most 'tales' of the past provided critique. This account identifies the key problem of stress linked to poor morale as a recent change: '*...morale tends to be rather low because we have had very good times and now times are not as good...It's run a lot leaner than it used to be...*'. As at Safety, she also disclosed that in-house training had not been very good in the past and was one of the things that Import Motors were working to improve. Like the manager at Safety, this manager revealed a misuse: not of training but of training resources (see 'tales' of training).

The 'tales' of the past are particularly significant in the organizations where relations with unions are an issue. The Company Employee Relations manager at Biscuits suggested that:

WA: The days of smoke filled rooms and people negotiating for its own sake are not appropriate to the challenges of today. (Biscuits:7)

The suggestion of underhand dealings or impropriety in this 'tale' of the past constructs the present as an improvement in terms of relations with employees and provides a contrast to the collaborative nature of relations with employees in the present.

In this interview there is an emphasis on the inevitability of change over time. In particular, with reference to the need for a new job evaluation scheme, he suggests that:

WA: ...the job evaluation scheme has been in for twenty years and we're a slightly different organization now to what we were twenty years ago... people are doing different jobs. (Biscuits:3).

The reference to the length of time since the scheme started, the understatement ('a slightly different organization') and the statement of the obvious ('people are doing different jobs') contained in this 'tale' of the past constructs and emphasises the necessity for change.

The Director of Human Resources at XYZ News provided an historical account of recruitment. In this he argues that the 'traditional' demarcations are going to break down and he then problematizes the previous organizational structure:

XA: In the past because we had these strong, vertical structures - departmental sectional structures - no one would ever dream of offering assistance across the departments. (XYZ News/a:6)

He also provides historical accounts of relations with the unions, of the power of unions, and of the removal of that power:

XA: In the pre-1989 days the union negotiations for the whole industry were done nationally. After 1989 they were taken over locally. In the traditional union structure, they had a ladder structure for particular skills...they would automatically get from the bottom of the ladder structure to the top - irrespective of skill, irrespective of talent. (XYZ News/a:9)

XA: ...*When we decided, years ago, that we were no longer going to recognise the trade unions right to bargain across the board wage packets or wage increases for their members, that right went... They are not going to be able to come in and demand XYZ News pays them across the board pay increases - on 3%, 5%, 10%, 15%, - 45% in the past...* (XYZ News/a:10)

These historical accounts of the demise of union power are linked to '*something called "Into the 90s"*' which involved several changes in working practices followed by various papers and reports prepared by managers about changes to managers policy. This 'tale' of the past constructs the 'bad old days' of departmentalism and unionism that provide a contrast to the present in which teamworking and compliant unions positions the HR function in a new role (i.e. welfare).

These 'tales' of the past illustrate that the past is 'known' as 'calculable'. As the 'tales' construct the key objects in the past they also identify mistakes and failings, along with the causes and consequences: they can identify decisions, practices and actions as incorrect. With hindsight they can identify what would have been a better decision or action. This 'eternal optimism' that things could have been done in a more satisfactory, more efficient, manner with improved results is carried forward into the present as an understanding that it is possible to learn from the past and that a better decision about the present can be made. Because the past is calculable, the present and the future are calculable.

At the same time, because mistakes and failure are located in the past, managers can distance themselves from responsibility for the grim consequences of policies and decisions. With the help of hindsight blame can be apportioned so that the integrity of the HR/personnel function and present day managers is maintained.

(ii) *Tales of unions*

Tales of unions appeared in only two of the private sector interviews (Biscuits and XYZ News) and in both cases are connected to 'tales' of the past. They are particularly interesting because, while it is emphasised by managers in both organizations that

circumstances have changed and that the role of unions have changed, the managers

construct the new role of unions in different ways. At XYZ News:

XA: ...they've had to adapt and I think, in the main, they've adapted very well. They've had to change their role. (XYZ News/a:10)

Similarly, at Biscuits:

WA: I think that the role of the Trade Union to manufacturing is changing...(Biscuits:5)

However, the changed role is seen very differently. At XYZ News:

XA: ...Industrial Relations are now hardly relevant to our industry - the unions have very little say in the running of the organization. We still recognise them, we still have an agreement, but basically they are of very little consequence, other than unions are always a very good stop-gap for the more excesses of management and we have no intention long term of derecognising them... (XYZ News/a:1).

In the context of changes in the role of managers and in working conditions at XYZ, the 'legitimate' role of the union is constructed in terms of protecting individuals and doing what might be considered to be the work of management. When new contracts put the responsibility on managers to make sure that they treat their people - 'who have given a lot to the company' - in a fair and equitable way, the new role of the Union is then 'being the first back stop to that process':

XA: ...in many industries, and this one is one of them, they've lost the right of collective bargaining...their role now, I think, is a different one. It's to see fair play. It's to make sure that if we are not going to have an across the board wage increase but we are going to treat individuals as individuals and pay them what their market salary is - they clearly have a view about that... (XYZ News/a:10).

In this interview at XYZ there is an example of the new role of unions in representing individuals and seeing fair play:

XA: ...I would quite see it as a legitimate thing for a trade union to come in and say 'Well, you know in a particular department, we've got two men and a woman and do you realise that last year the woman didn't get a pay increase and the two men did?' And now, I think that's quite legitimate thing to do - I would have wanted to make sure that situation never happened anyway. (XYZ News/a:10)

In contrast, the Company Employee Relations Manager at Biscuits argues that simply representing individuals is no longer the unions' role - although, in a similar manner to XYZ News, he suggests more involvement in the business:

WA: *I think that many of the Trade Unions are beginning to recognise that they need to be more involved in the business aspects of the operation and not simply seeing themselves as simply representing individuals...* (Biscuits:5)

The two accounts converge once again with an account of 'common interests' between the organization, the union, and employees. The themes of partnership and working together are emphasised. At Biscuits this partnership involves the development of consultative frameworks to maintain profits:

WA: *...where there are common interests [which must be in the case of this company as with most of them] where it's in the interests of us at this company, and therefore its employees, that we remain profitable, and therefore wherever possible we jointly develop a framework to achieve that aim.* (Biscuits:5)

Common interests are also used to argue for flexibility and changes to jobs:

WA: *Flexibility is necessary to ensure you maximise on your investment. So if new equipment requires different ways of working, then clearly it is in everybody's interest that people work in the way which suits that.* (Biscuits:6)

In contrast to 'the days of smoke filled rooms' he suggests that common interests require honesty:

WA: *...I think the important thing about it is that....when people are discussing issues of joint interest that they try to be as honest as possible in explaining what their position is and why they are saying what they are saying...* (Biscuits:7).

Similarly, at XYZ News, common interests are articulated through concepts of 'partnership' and a common 'agenda' of profitability and viability:

XA: *...The role of the union is to make sure, to be there, to be a barometer of the way the workforce feel, the way people are being treated as workers - and for the company that works with the trade union, very much, it's a partnership, and we have similar agendas. The agenda is obviously to make the company profitable and to keep the company viable in every way. The trade union no longer exists to screw everything it possibly can out of management. It's there to work with management and to make sure that, at the end of the day, we have a well motivated and well rewarded work force.* (XYZ News/a: 10)

XYZ News and Biscuits both praise the realistic approach of the unions in these 'tales' which construct common interests. At XYZ News the unions are characterized as 'enlightened' because they recognize the 'reality' of what is workable:

XA: *...we have a very flexible working agreement at the moment because a lot of the clauses in the agreement, the trade union recognise themselves, are unworkable, and so we have tended to ignore them - the company has tended to ignore them on its part and the*

trade union have tended not to push the issue because they realise that there is a lot in the agreement that is not workable in the modern 24-hour news organization. (XYZ News/a:1)

In this example the true, mutually agreed, 'reality' is revealed as contrary to the 'unworkable' formal agreements. This construction of 'reality' is affirmed by the interpretation of the action of the unions. There is also an expectation that the union will co-operate by recognizing the inevitability of the progress of technology:

XA: ...we would expect the trade union to come along and co-operate in that challenge because they recognise there is nothing they can do - technology is moving forward - but they also recognise, I think, that the NUJ and the NUJ members, are in some way pushing, backed by the new technology, but the old BECTU class - the old technical class - are going to disappear, and we have to together make the best of that. (XYZ News/a:2)

The praise is for the in-house union:

XA: ...I think at the moment we have probably an in-house trade union that are possibly in some ways are more enlightened than their national officers. (XYZ News/a:10)

This introduces, in addition to the then/now distinction created by the 'tales' of the past, an internal/external distinction. Such oppositions permit criticisms of unions in general while the common interests of unions and organization are constructed in discourse.

Similarly, at Biscuits the unions 'recognize' the inevitability of change and flexibility:

WA: ...the development of the job evaluation scheme for shop floor people is really a classic example of that where we've worked jointly to develop something which is able to recognise the changes that are going to come about rather than simply leaving people where they are at the moment. The trade [union] recognition of that is perhaps an indication that they perceive the future as being more important than the present (Biscuits:5).

WA: ...Flexibility within jobs is also something that is I think recognised by management and trade unions as really the direction in which life is having to go (Biscuits:6).

These claims that unions 'recognize' the management account of 'reality' helps to legitimate such an account as 'truthful'. At the same time the argument at Biscuits that the 'days of smoke filled rooms and people negotiating for its own sake are not appropriate to the challenges of today' characterizes 'old' unionism and erodes - on the basis of the progress of time - the legitimacy of alternative union accounts.

One final feature of note is that the changed power relations between unions and XYZ News has a direct impact on the HR function:

XA: ...Personnel - which was always reactive at XYZ News - we feel now, if we are not being pushed by trade unions and the sort of conflict management that trade unions create, then personnel and the way we treat our staff has got to become pro-active...a proactive personnel department which looks after the staff and the staff needs - greater emphasis on welfare... (XYZ News/a:1).

The argument that trade unions create 'conflict management' appears to contradict the 'tale' of 'common interests' in the XYZ interview. However, the distinctions between then/now and internal/external provide the means for constructing an alternative non-contradictory 'rationality' in this account.

These 'tales' of unions contribute to the construction of the environment and organization. They do this by locating hostile elements externally as part of the environment (e.g. union national officers) while locating supporting elements inside the organization (e.g. the in-house union, common interests, etc.). Management is then 'distanced' from responsibility for what happens in connection with causes outside the organization and can lay blame for problems in the environment while accepting responsibility for good relations with 'enlightened' unionists who see the 'common interests' of organization and individual.

(iii) Tales of new technology/new equipment

Another group of 'tales' common to the interviews with HR/personnel managers at both Biscuits and XYZ News concerns the introduction of new technology or equipment. Again the 'tales' illustrate similarities and dissimilarities in the way the respective organizations and environments are presented but in both accounts managerial responsibility is 'distanced' from responsibility for the introduction of new equipment while deriving a role for HR/personnel (e.g. training, new working practices) from the consequences. The Company Employee Relations Manager at Biscuits 'distances' management by associating the introduction of new equipment with unchallengeable investment decisions:

WA: *...the investment programming to some extent in new equipment which naturally drives the need to be as efficient as possible to make the best use of that investment.*
(Biscuits:2)

Management responsibility is further 'distanced' by the linking of the cause of changed working practices to the new equipment rather than with management decisions:

WA: *...where new equipment goes in we're looking for better ways of operating.*
(Biscuits:3)

Furthermore, 'common interests' are emphasised in connection with new equipment, flexibility in working, and the necessity of maximizing on investment. In this 'tale' of new equipment the organization is constructed as subject to an environment which is 'known' in terms of the uncontrollable and natural demands of investment decisions.

At XYZ News the multi-skilling of employees through training them to work with the new technology is presented as the only option:

XA: *...a clear alternative would be to just let the thing happen and make a whole tranche of people redundant who were not trained in the new technology. The problem with that is that the new technology is so new there isn't a tranche of people who could come in and replace them. So to not multi-skill is not really an option.* (XYZ News:4)

XYZ News expects the unions to co-operate with the introduction of new technology because they recognize the inevitability: there is '*nothing they can do - technology is moving forward*'. However, technology is not seen as totally determining:

XA: *... we always recognise that even when the new technology comes along there will be certain people who, by the very nature of their job and the very nature of their skills, will remain specialists...We will always need our top-flight cameramen and we will always need our top-flight tape-editors to do the two and five minute package, and we will always want our top-flight journalists with very specialist knowledge to continue doing that job.* (XYZ News:8)

XA: *...We would never think it appropriate to send one man, one journalist, a video journalist out, a journalist who goes out with his or her own camera and shoots material as well as coming back and editing it and writing it...* (XYZ News:3)

The conceptualization of technology as determining and inevitable, then, is contradicted by the market position of XYZ News as '*number two international news organization in the land*'. The use of a one person video technician/journalist role is seen as not appropriate for an organization in such a market position ('yet'). Hence, new

technology determines that change is necessary while other considerations determine how that change is operationalized within the organization.

At XYZ News it is thought that the introduction of new technology is going to break down traditional demarcations (see 'tales' of the past and 'tales' of structuring) and this provides the rationale for multi-skilling and teamworking. At XYZ News:

XA:...people have got to learn that they are part of a team - nobody is threatened by other members of the team, and they have got to start thinking in terms of "Well, I might be classed as an editor or a camera operator but I am just as capable of doing the job that the other guy does. I'm just as capable of going out and writing a story". (XYZ News:5)

New technology, it is predicted, will open '*all sorts of possibilities*' for the way that journalists work, and will change the skill base for a range of employees. This has implications for the training function and for the reorganization of work in 'bureaus'. Specific, carefully selected, groups of journalists and technicians are being targeted for training for multi-skilling across divides and XYZ News is beginning to '*break down the barriers*'. Teamworking already exists in small XYZ News bureaus in other cities and the problem is seen as being how that culture change might be imported into the main building.

This 'tale' of new technology at XYZ constructs the environment as a determinant of changes which cannot be opposed but the market position of XYZ prevents the 'logic' of technology being completed. The organization is, therefore, revealed as having to comply with opportunities which break down departmentalism and offer possibilities for multi-skilling and teamworking. As will be argued below, the constructions of this 'tale' have implications for the construction of the individual.

Tales of new technology/equipment were told in interviews with several other HR/personnel managers further illustrating variety and some similarity in environmental and organizational 'realities'. At Safety, the effect of new technology is seen not so much in terms of its use by the workforce as in its ability to monitor the workforce:

HA: I think the controls that we have on our resources, whether physical or human, we have far more information about what's going on than we ever did before. It's because of computerization and the reports that we have. We know where we are in regard to

financial performance, in regard to sales orders what have you, ending every four week period. And there is a report for the company covering that four week period. We've used the summary of the whole company, the region, the area, and down to the man. His performance, the areas' performance, the regions' performance. (Safety:4)

The impact of technology is not seen as completely benign:

HA: ...Because of this ability to monitor what we are doing out there and if it doesn't happen a question is asked why it hasn't happened and, therefore, immediately those people are put under quite significant stress. (Safety:8)

Stress is seen as '*certainly paramount these days*'. While this manager thinks that it is having an effect, the impact is unknown. The solutions to the problems are discipline, prescription, and monitoring by regional managers through formal, centrally-directed, coaching practices.

At Brokers, technology is one of a number of environmental factors which have changed the way the market operates. In particular, the use of electronic networking is seen as commoditising some products. At Import Motors, new technology does not seem to affect the operation directly, but it needs to be addressed because the organization wants to retain its staff and must, therefore, invest in them:

ZA: ...We want to keep our people. We want to make sure they are kept up to date with the latest technology and what have you. We've got to invest in them. (Import Motors/a:4)

For these managers, 'knowing' technology involves constructing it in terms of progress which is beyond the control of the organization but which necessitates organizational change. Management is 'distanced' from responsibility for the causes of such change (progress, investment decisions) and, while technology represents advance that cannot be halted, it must be matched by organizational change and individual change. The 'solution' to technology as a problem lies in better HR/personnel practices - changing job evaluations, flexibility, multi-skilling and teamwork, discipline and prescription, and investment in training.

In these 'tales' of new technology, then, technological progress is located as an environmental feature while the technology itself is located within the organization and

provides a role for HRM/personnel in areas such as training. These 'tales' also contribute to the construction of the individual (as stressed, as inadequately skilled) so as to provide a welfare role for HRM/personnel.

(iv) *Tales of the environment*

In addition to these largely contextual 'tales' (of the past, of unions, and of new technology) were descriptions in which the environment was constructed in an organizationally specific manner. In most of these organizations (Easyway excepted) the environment is constructed as an externality through which the organization can and must move to new positions. However, there was considerable variety in the way the environment was constructed. For example, at Biscuits they are operating in the context of an economic climate that is (possibly) emerging from recession:

WA: ...from a national point of view it's obviously very tough, we're still in recession and despite the green shoots of recovery which may or may not appear...the food business has certainly been affected by the current economic climate, and the biscuit business no less... (Biscuits:5).

In this economic environment the most important challenge facing Biscuits is *'Probably the change of power into the key multiples in terms of their ability to influence the market place and prices in particular'*. The market has a consciousness in that it has a particular understanding of 'quality':

WA: ...we believe that it's important to set high standards of quality in terms that the market we're operating in would understand rather than in a general sense... (Biscuits:4).

However, the key multiples are not the only relevant environmental features - there is also the mind of the consumer:

WA: The corporate strategy, as far as Biscuits is concerned, is to improve our share of the market and to ensure that we maintain the integrity of the brands that we have in the consumer's mind... (Biscuits:4)

This is a construction of an environment which permits organizations to be strategically directed and to move towards long term interests. One key feature of this account is that investment is constructed as part of the environment beyond control or

challenge. Management is, therefore, 'distanced' from responsibility for the consequences of investment decisions.

Similarly, at Bio-Tech Screens: the business that it operates in is described as a 'maze'. For Bio-Tech the environment consists of a large number of relevant entities including investors, collaborators, consultants, contractors, competitors, external providers or partners, partner companies and major pharmaceutical companies. Several of these entities need managing. In particular, the relationships with external partners or providers needs managing to keep up with changes at different levels in those companies, including the 'political' level.

As has been noted, one key 'tale' of the past at Bio-Tech Screens involved failed competitors. In a similar manner, hierarchies and the culture of consultancies and other environmental entities are critiqued in cautionary 'tales' which legitimate and justify the 'flat' organizational structure and the interdependencies at Bio-Tech:

GA: ...where hierarchy tends to exist is either where you've got systems of operations where you need some sort of supervisory thing or unfortunately, sometimes hierarchy exists where the individual isn't able to fulfil all the roles and therefore needs someone reporting to them who can specialise in one or another of those roles... (Bio-Tech Screens/a:11)

GA: ...I've been in consultancies of 150 people where...everyone does their own job and they don't depend on each other. They've got their own external clients... (Bio-Tech Screens/a:9).

These 'tales' of the environment from Bio-tech construct the organization through a negative example of how it should not be done. In that process the need for highly-skilled and flexible individuals is emphasised.

The recession has affected Safety and the extinguisher industry as a whole which has contracted as businesses and factories have closed. However, things are beginning to pick up slowly. Legislation creates some of the demand for the product but, although Safety are the market leaders, the market 'out there' is very competitive and there is 'tremendous pressure on organizations now'. People are 'biting at your heels to try and take the business away from you' in a world and market which are always changing. The

geographical spread of the market - the whole of the UK - is seen as an added problem for Safety and the extinguisher industry.

The major challenges facing Import Motors are the yen rate, which makes the product rather expensive to import into the UK, and the competitors who are improving the quality of their products by increasing the number of '*little extras*'. Factors which may improve the situation are the decision by the manufacturer/supplier to build cars in an EC country, and the negotiations with the manufacturer in Japan to gain improvements in product quality and/or price. Although the present situation is compared unfavourably with the '*very good times*' of the past this is not explained as extraordinary as many other companies are seen as in the same position. In this 'tale' from Import Motors the organization - and managers - are constructed as relatively helpless with regard to environmental factors. The environment is constructed as largely beyond control by Import Motors, except through negotiation with their suppliers.

However, this 'tale' of the environment at Import Motors can be contrasted with that from Easyway. Easyway is different from the other organizations in respect of the way 'what's happening externally' is portrayed. The external business or economic environment, as understood by the other organizations, does not feature at all. The industry - characterized as specialized, controversial, and difficult - is currently going through some interesting changes. However, for what could be described as a multi-level marketing company, 'out there' refers to its sales force or 'distributors' ('don't call it a pyramid, because it's not - we get very upset at that...' Management Information Systems Manager - Easyway/b:1.). Distributors are not employed by the organization: they are described as 'milling around' and they need looking after. The distributors are characterized as 'people who want to make money and become entrepreneurs'. At Easyway there are 'so many outside factors to try to control'.

As noted, XYZ News has a market position as 'number two international news organization'. However, they are using other UK and US companies who have equipped more recently with newer technology as 'benchmarks' although they do not have exactly the kind of technology which XYZ News will use in the future.

Apart from new technology the main impact of the external environment on XYZ News is through the labour market. After considerable staff reductions in the past, up until recently the staff turnover was low. With expansion of other TV channels, there is now a heavy turnover in journalism. There is no existing group in the labour market who are trained in the new technology but XYZ News is filling from the bottom with graduates who have already been trained to cross occupational divides. The availability of data on market pay levels means that at XYZ News staff are paid market rates which vary on the basis of talent. Some people are *'a hell of a lot more talented and therefore a lot more employable by the employers than others'*.

In contrast to the account given by XYZ News, the interview with Brokers provided a rich description of the environment in which the past is contrasted with the present. Brokers are intermediaries located between clients and insurance markets. In the past they relied on inefficiencies in the market to make a good income, but the inefficiencies have been taken away by additional forms of competition, by the use of electronic networking which commoditises some of the products, and by smarter clients. The Michael Porter model is used to identify the key elements - suppliers, clients, and competitors. The competitors of the future are not traditional brokers, but *'consultancy organisations, companies which are either into organizational consultancy, IT consultancy, or whatever'*.

In the context of an historically 'very soft' market and a current highly competitive market place, what was seen by Stock Market analysts as a 'profits crisis' led to a loss of credibility: the share price of Brokers halved in three months. In response, management consultants were brought in who provided a *'view about market segmentation'*. Another

'world' is referred to in which competitors '*already earn far more out of consultancy fees*' than do Brokers: this is the world Brokers are now aiming to get into.

Both the client market and the labour market are described at RRM. Their clients are trying to retain existing customers and get new ones and it has become far more effective for them to try to build loyalty through devices such as supermarket loyalty cards and 'airmiles' schemes for credit card users. The clients need an integrated marketing service without the old boundary between above- and below-the-line marketing and the mission at RRM is to focus on the larger clients who use a larger range of services.

The external labour market is described as a competitive market place with competition for telephone operators from other major employers (RAC, Direct Line Insurance) and competition for marketing personnel from the major marketing labour market in London.

The way that the environment is constructed as an object by HR/personnel managers is important to the way the other key objects (organization, individual) and the repertoires (A and B) are constructed. These 'tales' construct the environment as external, as often hostile, and as uncontrollable (although some particular parts can be managed). However, the environment can be 'known' and, because these particular versions of the environment are constructed in discourse by HR/personnel managers, those managers are constructed in discourse as experts in environmental 'knowledge' which includes knowledge of the 'nature' of people.

(v) *Tales of people*

So far, the main focus of this report has been on the construction of environment and organization as 'objects' in management 'tales'. In examining the 'tales' of people the main focus is on how HR/personnel managers construct the key object 'individual' - mainly as a collection of attributes and problems - and identify a role for managers. However, these

'tales' also locate the individual in a context which involves the further construction of environment and organization.

As already noted, Import Motors and Safety both identify stress as a problem for the workforce. For Import Motors, poor morale and stress have two sources - the exchange rate and the age of the directors. The exchange rate impacts directly on profits and on morale:

ZA: ...everyone is very concerned that the profits in the company have obviously dropped drastically - you have to try and boost morale...Morale tends to be rather low because we have had very good times and now times are not as good... (Import Motors/a:2)

The exchange rate problems feed through into policies of non-replacement, into the way work is shared out, and into the role of the personnel manager:

ZA: ...Looking round departments to see whether there is any particular high stress areas...when an employee leaves they are not always replaced. It's run a lot leaner than it used to be, and so what I am trying to do to make sure that the work is being actually spread out through the department fairly and any pressure areas - see what I can do to relieve those areas. (Import Motors/a:2)

The first solution to the problem of stress in this 'tale' of people constructs work as programmable and adjustable to meet the changing circumstances. The second set of problems concern the ages of key directors and the lack of identifiable replacements. The personnel manager sees this as a particular problem because:

ZA: ...we are fairly bureaucratic here in that our MD is the decision maker. Now when the MD leaves, often when you run a company like that, the company can either topple or can be taken over by another very powerful person...(Import Motors/a:6).

This is a particular problem at Import Motors because of additional ownership worries adding to concerns about succession:

ZA: ...there is always this thought, I think, in a lot of the staff's mind, that whereas with many other Japanese car manufacturers, it's the Japanese that have taken over. And I know that that is causing concern to some people. Because we are 50/50 owned - 50 UK, 50 Japanese - and while we have this, not instability, but this...we need to be reassured really. We need to know what the long term plans are, and at the moment, we aren't being told...(Import Motors/a:6)

The personnel manager can respond to stress/morale/reassurance problems in a variety of ways. She has a company doctor to whom she can refer people she is really

worried about for a full medical. She believes that this *'can relieve stress on its' own because they feel as if we are showing care for that person and we are going to try to do something to help them'*. Alternatively, morale could be boosted by training:

ZA: *...I'm looking very closely at training, so that is something else that we really need to concentrate on because we haven't been very good at that in-house in the past. It is an area that I want to look at because I feel that that could help boost morale...then you do appear to be investing in your people...* (Import Motors/a:2)

Even structural changes are seen as a possible means of boosting morale:

ZA: *Actually we are looking at an option at the moment - there's a company called [Named consultants], we may well bring them in, to have a look at the structure here. Hopefully to boost morale, because if they see that we are trying to do something...*(Import Motors/a:6)

The common theme in this 'tale' of people is the need to *'appear'* to be doing something - to be investing in people, training them, restructuring, or changing workloads.

Fortunately, not all staff suffer from poor morale or stress:

ZA: *...we won't actually sit down and discuss everyone, because I mean some people are just happy in their jobs and, you know, they always have wonderful appraisals and they are not really too worried...*(Import Motors/a:8).

This 'tale' of people, then, identifies certain environmental and organizational factors as the causes of stress and poor morale, but also identifies the problems as only affecting certain individuals. Furthermore, the solutions construct these problems as essentially psychological, construct people as psychologically open to manipulation (through what the organization appears to be doing), and construct a welfare role for the personnel manager.

At Safety the main cause of stress is the new technology which gives Safety the means to monitor and question people. Stress affects junior and senior employees and manifests itself through long-term absence, poor performance and trouble with managers, and job loss. Three issues are highlighted as contributing to the failure of the organization to deal with the problem: 'bland' disciplinary procedures, poor training, and the failure to follow through monitoring.

Employees suffering from stress are characterized as:

HA: *...ordinary people perhaps have got themselves in the job and they're struggling perhaps a bit...* (Safety:9).

In this part of the 'tale' there is no blame attached to employees. Nonetheless, the organization is still trying to improve the quality of people taken on, reduce turnover, and reduce the time it takes to recruit. These issues are being addressed through improvements in the pre-selection processes which necessitates more involvement from the personnel department in practices which had previously been out in the field.

The head of personnel and training at Safety constructs the essential aim of the personnel initiatives in terms of:

HA: *...trying to improve the...effectiveness of our staff, trying to improve the efficiency of their productivity.* (Safety:1)

The problems are constructed as psychological and, in addition to the solutions of discipline, prescription, monitoring and formal, centrally-directed, coaching practices identified in earlier 'tales', the key to better results is seen in terms of communications:

HA: *...if it's important that people are informed and if you believe that well informed people are better motivated, and if better motivated people mean they provide a better service to our customer, and if they work harder because they are better motivated and what have you, you are going to get better results...* (Safety:7).

This example constructs people as 'programmable' in that it constructs a solution to one of the major unsolved HR/personnel issues - motivation - in a relatively simple and 'rational' way.

At Bio-Tech Screens and XYZ News people are understood in terms of their occupations. At Bio-Tech Screens:

GA: *...scientists like to be trained, they are used to being trained...* (Bio-Tech Screens/a:8)

This is significant at Bio-Tech Screens because 80% are PhDs or graduates. Together with the age range of employees this means that Bio-Tech has 'a fairly homogeneous profile of people... a cluster of people, 60% of the company probably

between the ages of 27 and 32'. This high intellect core resource is driven by interdependency. Therefore 'the culture, the values and beliefs are the important things'.

For Bio-Tech Screens, the options for policies are quite open and varied, but:

GA: ...as the business issue becomes better defined and translates into the organization - as being a people issue you'll narrow down on a particular approach for a particular issue. If you've got a performance issue it may be a training issue, it may actually be a remuneration issue...you've got the sort of people who are going to respond to getting bonuses for achievement - then you might be into, what's the balance of bonus versus basic pay for that individual? Or you might be into a pattern of training or you might be into a motivational thing. (Bio-Tech Screens/a:10).

So despite the homogeneity, the policies are varied to cope with the variation among people. However, there are organizational requirements that suggest that the 'calibre' of employees is a key factor. The Head of HR at Bio-Tech Screens suggests that:

GA: ...you can only run a flat organization if you've got the calibre of people in who have got the potential to handle more than one or two roles, because where hierarchy tends to exist is either where you've got systems of operations where you need some sort of supervisory thing or unfortunately, sometimes hierarchy exists where the individual isn't able to fulfil all the roles and therefore needs someone reporting to them who can specialise in one or another of those roles. So it throws it right back on the skills of the people again - which is actually good news for human resources (Bio-Tech Screens/a:11).

This 'tale' of people constructs the individual as similar to other individuals in terms of age, qualifications and occupation, but varied in terms of training needs and motivation. The conditional logic in this example identifies the HR role in selection and development as central to the structuring of the organization.

At XYZ News people are also understood in terms of characteristics of particular occupations:

XA: ...Journalists being journalists will want to, not just write stories to the pictures they can see, but they'll want to cut and paste the pictures as well. (XYZ News/a:2)

At the same time however:

XA: ...we are taking some technicians and we are teaching them to write. Now there is nothing very radical about that, journalism isn't a black art...What we are now saying is you go that little step further - you cut the pictures as well as you have been doing in the past and then write the words to it... (XYZ News/a:3)

This particular construction of people at XYZ News implies that journalists have particular attributes, but that non-journalists can be taught to be journalists in that they can be taught to cross occupational divides. Furthermore, training non-journalists to be journalists is presented as fairly simple and unproblematic. However, what is required for this to happen is a change in the culture of the organization.

Two fairly long anecdotes are provided as examples of culture change and the crossing of occupational divides. The culture change is linked to a particular understanding of teamworking. At XYZ News:

XA: ...no one else is going to come in and help you, you've got to be resourceful (XYZ News/a:6).

But at the same time:

XA: ...what we are trying to do is instil in them that they have to accept that when one particular section is pushed people from another section who are not quite so pushed at that moment in time will be put into that section that is overstretched - to help and assist...people will be expected to help one another out. (XYZ News/a:6)

So on the one hand, teams of multi-skilled people who cross skill divides must be autonomous and non-dependent, while on the other hand team members are expected to help out other teams when work volumes change. These apparently contradictory statements are rationalized by the claim that:

XA: ...we've really come to the conclusion that teams are very useful where appropriate - but you have to try and make people realise, even if they are in a team, that they are actually working for the whole...the only team at the end of the day that is important is the programme team sending the programme out...the one thing that is important is meeting the deadline...(XYZ News/a:7)

The rationale for teamwork is, therefore, subsumed under the rationale of the deadline.

The teamwork rationale fails to make an appearance in the context of rewards in which the focus is on the individual:

XA: ...what we do now is we pay our staff market rates. And market rates for two or three people doing the same job will vary because some people are going to be a hell of a lot more talented and therefore a lot more employable by the employers than others. So we have to take into account when we fix salaries that individuals' poachability...we are going to treat individuals as individuals and pay them what their market salary is... (XYZ News/a:9 & 10)

The 'proof' of this construction of 'reality' is the construction of the '*total pay plan*' policy as successful: more and more people '*have wanted*' to go on the 'undefined' contract introduced by the '*total pay plan*'. They work '*like managers*' being flexible and doing whatever hours are required. However, some attributes of individuals mean that the union can provide useful management services in addition to their role in overseeing fair play:

XA: ...In the first instance I would want to encourage any staff with any grievance about anything at all to go and talk to their line manager. But some people are reluctant to do that - their personalities are such that they don't feel they can possibly stand up to a manager, or whatever - and they have to have somewhere they can go. Of course they can come and see me, but in the main people are happier to go and see colleagues and peers, which is effectively the union in the joint shops. (XYZ News/a:10)

Of all the 'tales' of people this one constructs the individual as an object with the most 'contradictory' attributes. The idea of occupational attributes is raised and then rejected; people are constructed as both capable and self-reliant - and as psychologically insecure; rewards are allocated on an individual basis but work is allocated to teams; teamworking is praised - but only where '*appropriate*'. Such 'contradictions' are reflected in the construction of the role of HRM - '*greater emphasis on welfare*' - while it is accepted that people would rather contact their colleagues. When confronted with such contradictions this manager constructs a new 'rationality' from the traditional heart of news reporting - the deadline. However, this new 'rationality' is dependent on the construction of work as programmable (as multi-skilled, as teachable to anyone) and on the construction of people as programmable (to do multi-skilled work, to be motivated by their rewards in comparison to the market, to be psychologically able to switch from acting as team players to a loyalty to the deadline).

At Brokers, HR development problem involves changing the '*profile*' of employees away from a traditional role into a perceived future role. The approach being taken is to emulate the organizations' shift towards providing consultancy services by providing

consultancy HR development services working with client departments, or with people who have a problem, to develop an approach. The issues to be addressed include:

UA: *...what kind of people, how would people behave in the organization, what would be the differences from the way they behave now, and what might give rise to those differences. And obviously things like their level of ability would be an issue, or type of ability, their general level of education and so on* (Brokers:6).

As an example the Director of Human Resource Development at Brokers identified a particular group of managers where there had been a high expectation that their role would change. Their role did change but their behaviour had not and this led to the development of a project to work on their behaviours.

This 'tale' constructs the individual as programmable, through HR/personnel development techniques which operate on roles and behaviours, to meet new organizational requirements. The identification of the failure of people to change their behaviour as their roles have changed identifies a new role for HR/personnel which requires consultancy expertise. Furthermore, the assertion that five years is a *reasonable* time span for the management of HR constructs individuals as a special kind of resource that requires different treatment.

At Easyway the most important challenge in terms of people is finding the right people with the right qualities to fit and maintain the organization. The recruitment focus is on attracting the people they would like to work there. The Personnel Manager thinks that *'It's almost as important to be a Easyway person as it is to be able to do the role for which you are applying'*.

She describes Easyway people as *'probably more committed than most'*, *'very enthusiastic'*, *'very open minded'* and as *'giving rather than just taking'*. Easyway expect *'110%'* from average employees. All employees are encouraged to question things and are not pigeon-holed. The manager suggests that it is *'almost a sharing experience'* working for Easyway (and she acknowledges that I might need a bucket when I listen to the recording). She also feels that HR managers, as opposed to personnel managers, may be:

PA: ...losing sight of actually what people are and their individual needs. And I think there is a danger that you start to look at people as commodities in the same way as you would your computer equipment... (Easyway/a:10).

In particular she feels that there is a danger that people are seen as more than people or that the human element of people is not considered.

She stresses that *'there is a quality about the kinds of people that we like to have in Easyway that is probably one better than a normal organization'*. This is because the industry is seen as very specialised, controversial and difficult: it does not have a very good reputation. Working for Easyway is compared to working for the Inland Revenue where *'everybody automatically despises you'*. This is seen as a problem that Easyway people have to learn to deal with.

Reward initiatives range from a mention at a departmental meeting, through hand-written 'Thank You' notes, financial bonuses (e.g. a record token), a recognition programme for service (every five years), to lunch with the general manager for an entire year without absence.

Succession is presented as an issue that was not addressed until there was a spell of being *'run by committee'* after the general manager left. Following the appointment of a new general manager they were able to go through a reorganization which provided a structure and direction. The new structure was a response to the wishes of the employees and reflected what they were already doing in their jobs: it provided the authority, autonomy, recognition, titles and budgetary controls necessary to carry out their existing roles:

PA: ...it actually gave more opportunities to more people to find themselves a career direction than perhaps they felt they had before. Because they could then see *'Oh well, if I do this and I work really hard' and assuming they want to, then 'Perhaps I could be a team leader in x, and from there I can now see my own succession in plan'*. Whereas before I think a lot of people felt *'I'm doing this and I think I'm doing a great job but where do I go? Where is my recognition? Where is my direction?'* (Easyway/a:8).

Succession is now an area where the organization is working hard at a number of levels to ensure they can release people if a senior manager leaves. However,

PA: ...*What we tend to find is we've got senior managers who are extremely good in their own areas, but aren't necessarily capable of taking on the others...* (Easyway/a:7).

In addition, the managers at Easyway are *'hands on'* and this can create its own problems in that they do not have the *'luxury'* to actually step back and manage.

Because of *'massive growth'* people were being put in positions:

PA: ...*perhaps before they are slightly ready to do so. It's a bit of a sink or swim. Most of them, fortunately, have swum. You know, we've got a lot of guidance, a lot of help, and a lot of support from the senior management group, they've been able to do that. But it's been a very interesting time for people and it's certainly developed people - probably beyond what they thought they would be able to develop to* (Easyway/a:7).

The organization was founded on the basis that *'distributors are people who want to make money and become entrepreneurs'*. This has a beneficial impact on the employees because some of this entrepreneurship filters through to them.

Potential contradictions between culture, expectations and business strategy are explained by reference to people:

PA: *Yeah. I think you will always come up against contradictions because you are dealing with people...* (Easyway/a:12).

However, this issue is not problematized at Easyway because the founders, who are still in charge, *'built their business based on people'*.

This construction of the *'Easyway person'* constitutes people as individuals who can be programmed psychologically through a range of techniques such as reward initiatives and career progression. The *'tale'* constructs people as financially motivated and locatable within a hierarchy in which they find reward from autonomy and recognition.

At Biscuits the focus on the individual is explained in terms of *'trying to drive responsibility down to the lowest possible level within the organization'*. The aim is to *'improve the efficiency of the organization through the efficiency of each individual employee...by everybody contributing that much more'*. In the case of managers this is achieved through functionalised management structures and performance pay which *'has*

the consequence of focussing people more on performance related elements of their job and less so on particular personal styles or attributes'.

The 'tale' of people at Biscuits constructs them as capable of contributing more, and this potential can be realized through structural initiatives.

At RRM, where the central issue concerned change, the Personnel Consultant problematized change in terms of communication and recruitment. The policy on recruitment reflects the challenges caused by rapid growth:

QA: ...it's recruiting bigger people - So it's recruiting more senior people who have got experience in what we do. The last two or three years has been very much growing our own, bringing them up through the structure. (RRM:6)

This recruitment policy is contrasted with the disadvantages of 'growing your own':

QA: ...they come to a point when they want more, and you can't offer them more, so they leave. Obviously, in a state of change or in a state of rapid growth, you do get fall out - because people can't cope with it or don't like the changes. So staff retention is a hot button for us. (RRM:6)

However, growth also provides benefits in terms of opportunities for existing people and, as there are fewer layers in the structure, they can 'kind of couch it positively...there's no sort of negative "Oh, that person has come in above me"'.

RRM have to maintain competitiveness in terms of the remuneration package in two occupational groupings. There is strong local competition for labour in the call centre operation (employing telephone operators) with a number of major telephone service providers based in the same city. There is a problem with recruiting marketing specialists in that the majority work in London. The difficulty lies in attracting them to work in the West Country, despite the improved quality of life outside the capital. For RRM:

QA: ...the philosophy is investing in our people and we're actually going for the IIP award...We are in a competitive market place and it's the old phrase you will hear thousands of times from personnel people 'We are only as good as our people' because everybody's got the same machinery...So it is very much investing in our people, developing our people. Glibly it's recruiting and retaining the best people to make us a good company to work for. (RRM:9)

This 'tale' constructs people at RRM as important but resistant to change. The effects of such a construction impact on a range of HR/personnel practices including the recruitment of different people. People are constructed as financially motivated because of the local labour market, and as programmable through cultural/ communications initiatives.

The variety in the constructions of people in the 'tales' of HR/personnel managers does not hide the 'eternal optimism' that 'knows' people as potentially more productive than they are in the present. Such 'knowledge' of people and their psychology constructs an ongoing role for HR/personnel in realizing potential.

(vi) *Tales of training, measurement, and communications.*

This section focuses on how the key objects (environment, organization, individual) are constructed in management 'tales' about techniques and practices of management. Only three such practices are included in this section (for reasons of space) and the selection has been made on the basis of variety in the telling of 'tales' while providing sufficient common ground for comparison.

Training is seen as important at Import Motors because it gives the appearance of investing in people. It brings people up to date with new systems, ideas and technology, and it is seen as essential for staff retention. Those returning from training write reports which provide information on training for the personnel manager. The problem for the personnel manager is that only one-fifth of departments had used their training budgets and she felt it was up to her to motivate people and get them to identify with what training was available.

Monitoring is seen as a key part of the Personnel Managers' job at Import Motors:

ZA: ...*We keep records, personnel records, sickness records, holiday records. So we are monitoring all the time...* (Import Motors/a:1)

Training is one activity that is regularly monitored by reports:

ZA: ...*I always ask them to write a report - and then I can think of somebody else that that course would be suitable for. So it's getting information back all the time from people that helps me decide what I'm able to do...*(Import Motors/a:3).

Similarly, appraisals are used for monitoring:

ZA: ...we do run an appraisal system here and it's really quite important that we do actually spend a lot of time studying those appraisals. Because that could be your main source of information as to where there are possibly problems, training needs, even stress things, financial worries, an awful lot you can gain from reading appraisals....the ones we identify, we need to look at, and we would have a discussion about it and hopefully resolve a problem that may come up in the future. (Import Motors/a:8)

Monitoring and communication are represented as linked responsibilities of the Personnel Manager:

ZA: So it's getting information back all the time from people that helps me decide what I'm able to do. So I have to be able to communicate with everyone within the company, from a cleaner to the MD, to gather all this information together and then to, hopefully, be able to resolve any problems that come up (Import Motors/a:3).

However, on some key issues she feels that the lack of communication within the organization is a problem:

ZA: ...we need to be reassured really. We need to know what the long term plans are, and at the moment, we aren't being told. So it's very difficult for me to actually do anything until I am informed of what's actually happening...(Import Motors/a:6)

These 'tales' construct individuals as programmable in that they are subject to monitoring, communications and training practices designed to operate on them at a psychological level - to reassure, to appraise, to retain and to modify behaviour.

While training is constructed at Import Motors as useful in terms of boosting morale, at Safety this approach was seen as a misuse of training:

HA: ..In the past training has been used as a bit of a sweetener - 'Oh, he needs some training. We'll send him on a course' - but it's not really been properly thought through what we are trying to achieve... (Safety:3).

Now training is seen as 'fundamental'. The problems for management are concerned with the assessment of 'whether the investment in training has actually been worthwhile for that particular period'. Training had previously been out in the field but, more recently, the personnel department had increased control over budgets, introduced annual training plans, and invested more in sales training using an outside trainer and a series of courses. The regional managers are being encouraged to reinforce the training with documentation,

coaching, monitoring, checking and following through. Future training is geared to this formalized approach and the aim is to increase training which is specifically related to the task.

The measurement involved in this approach is not simply an administrative function.

It is intended to change what regional managers do:

HA: ...*So when they go out on their field visits their accompaniments with the staff, we are hoping they will reinforce the training with the documentation that's been produced. So that it's a coaching method really - it's reinforcing, it's checking what they've been taught...any training that we do for the future is going to be geared to that sort of thing. To be specific, what are we trying to achieve? and how do we measure it? Whether it's been effective...(Safety:3).*

What allows this monitoring to take place is new technology. However, the manager at Safety also provides a critique of new technology and of the focus on financial measurements:

HA: ...*Because of that pressure and the focus on the figures, sometimes we lose sight of what we are trying to achieve... (Safety:5).*

The focus on the figures results, not just in stress for employees, but in an incomplete measurement of success:

HA: ...*I've been arguing for some time that we shouldn't just have financial measures to determine the success of the organization. We actually need non financial measures. We shouldn't have too many but we should have some. To see whether the management of our human resources - the effort we are putting in - to get them to work in a particular way to be more successful because if they are more successful the results will show...but at times we need to find out whether people are actually carrying out the instructions that we think are important that they should carry out. So there should be some non-financial measures. 'What are they?' you may ask. (Safety:5)*

This line of argument leads him to suggest a novel approach to measurement which he has put to the directors:

HA: ...*I have said to them 'If you believe communication is happening and is the responsibility of management, why don't you - at your executive meetings, your board meetings - put on the agenda at the end of it "communication" and go round and ask what have you done in your areas to see whether you have been effective and what have you communicated?' There will be a measure. (Safety:5).*

Communication is identified as a problem at Safety but it is admitted that the solutions are, at the moment, little more than wishful thinking because the opinions of the

Head of Personnel and Training are not shared by all the directors. The solution to communication problems is prescriptive: it is a tale of what *ought* to be. However, the solution is distinctively 'rational' in that it uses a conditional logical argument to suggest that, if communication is the way to better results, it is sensible to have a formal communications system. Thus communications is problematized at Safety in terms of two issues - the geographical spread of the market/workforce (with employees working from home to cover the whole of the UK) and the grapevine:

HA: Because I think if you have an informed workforce about what our objectives are - about its progress, about any changes in policy, about the recruitment of people, senior people that may be coming or going retiring or what have you, and about any other point that you see as critical that people need to know - if you had a formal communication system, like the Industrial Society's for team briefing, you have a chance for getting that information out to people and stop some of the negative effects of the grapevine. (Safety:6)

However, extensive formal communication systems run by a communications manager - 'open channels from the directors of the company down to various people working at whatever level' - are also understood as a mechanism for introducing discipline to improve results.

These 'tales' construct organization and individual as subject to 'rational' improvement through the application of '*discipline*' and '*prescription*' in the form of training, monitoring and communication practices.

A similar critique of previous training is supplied by Brokers. Not everything the pre-restructured training departments had done was valid:

UA: ...there were certain other things we got rid of. Essentially redundant functions within training units. I mean they genuinely were redundant functions. Things that looked good two years ago... (Brokers:8).

Training run by Brokers' HR Development department is to become focused on management development and technical knowledge. Other training will be dealt with by line management:

UA: ...There was a lot of short run - very short term - interpersonal skills training and a huge amount of administration effort around it. The typical two- to three-day course in assertiveness or time management or that kind of thing that happens. Now I said what we

ought to do is to give, essentially, all the skills stuff, out-source it and, secondly give the responsibility for ordering it to the line. We are not going to be a travel agents... (Brokers:8).

Because of increasing demand for certain services from the HR Development department there is a gradual move towards an HR consultancy approach:

UA ...I take a view that if we are expecting the organization to get better at consultancy then, really, the human resource development function ought really to have those competencies themselves. It ought to know how to operate in that way. If it doesn't, how can it influence consultancy decisions in other parts of the organization?... (Brokers:9)

The implications of this for the restructuring of the HR department is centralization, a refocussing of training and development to change the profile of the workforce, and succession planning.

This 'tale' of refocussing and restructuring training at Brokers clearly constructs certain kinds of training for particular people as important and asserts ownership by the HR department. The 'tale' aligns the structure of the department with the new structuring of the organization. The construction of organization and individual as programmable locates the HR department as central to the operation of the company.

At RRM, the responsibility for identifying training needs and individual training plans lies with the line managers assisted by the in-house Personnel Consultants. Training is delivered from a variety of sources and they are working towards IIP accreditation. Training is linked to the competitive market place and to the aim of recruiting and retaining the best people.

Communication is an important issue at RRM ('a must') in the context of rapid expansion, a change of culture and a change of mission:

QA: ...It's all about communication, communicating the changes - so that there has been a big initiative on 'How do we communicate with our staff?', 'are they comfortable with change?'. It's understanding the implications of doing things and, it's very much trying to understand the individual needs of people, the departmental needs, and also the corporate needs. And seeing how we can fit that jigsaw together. (RRM:3)

This is seen as a particular problem at RRM because of the logistics of running a 24 hour/7 days a week business. The working environment is described as '*chaotic*', '*frenetic*' and '*dynamic*'. The current challenge at RRM is :

QA: *...how do we make sure that with this new culture and this new mission that is coming out now, how does that emanate to Sarah who is coming on at 7 o'clock this evening, goes home at 11 and will never see any of the 9 to 5ers?* (RRM:10)

In addition, RRM has three sites, one of which is 40 miles away from the other two: it is not practical to move onto a single site and this compounds the communications problems.

In general, communication is handled through team briefing and written feedback. Some management layers have been taken out '*to try and ease the managerial reporting lines*' and to ease communication. The '*solution*' to the communication challenges is seen as '*culture*' - an informal managerial style, an open door policy, and making employees comfortable with '*talking of, discussing of, sharing opinions, and coming to*'.

It is acknowledged that there is some irony in communications being a challenge for RRM where the main service provided is based on communications. To address this particular problem they have just created a new post with responsibility for internal marketing rather than external marketing. This will involve more than news letters and will include new technology (e.g. video walls, etc.).

At Bio-Tech Screens, where there is a fairly homogeneous workforce with a high intellect, training is seen as one of the more successful methods that have been used to change the culture:

GA: *...one's been able get across quite a lot of organizational and political messages by briefing consultants well and doing it through skills training courses. So even something like interviewing skills - you could run an interviewing skills course but you can run it in the context of when the organization's doubling in size and that means other things as well as training human skill base...* (Bio-Tech Screens/a:8)

Measurement at Bio-Tech Screens is in terms of inputs and outputs:

GA: *...We measure inputs - the quality of science going in, the quality of anybody's specialism - and we'll measure very strongly the outputs, which will be how many lead*

compounds we get for a programme, how many people we retain or lose, - how we get from A to B is again wide open really...(Bio-Tech Screens/a:11).

This approach leads the Head of HR to claim that *'all we are interested in at the end of the day is the quality of what's going in and the quality of what's coming out in the right time'*.

At XYZ News training is seen as having an important role when user-friendly new technology is introduced in the future. However, before that new technology is available, XYZ News is targeting specific, selected groups of people (journalists and technicians) and training them to multi-skill across each others divides. How staff for multi-skill training are selected is not explicitly stated. However, the aim is to have 30% of the relevant staff multi-skilled by the time the new technology is available.

The clearest example of a 'tale' of measurement comes from the interview at Biscuits where they are restructuring and introducing a job evaluation scheme for shop floor workers and performance related pay (PRP) for the managers. The aim of the policies is:

WA: *...to try to concentrate on more of the measurable dimensions of the business...*
(Biscuits:2)

For Biscuits, 'performance' means *'the achievement of objectives for the year which is monitored through the appraisal system'*. The introduction of PRP has the consequence of focussing people on performance-related elements of their work and less on *'particular personal styles or attributes'*. The focus on performance means that issues of quality can be addressed. Performance and organization are *'key elements'* in achieving the objectives of the corporate strategy.

At Easyway, communications are seen as *'vital'* and are dealt with horizontally through *'communications teams'* and vertically through team briefings. These are supplemented by *'All Company Meetings'* (which have become less frequent as the organization has outgrown facilities). The culture provides opportunities for good communications:

PA: ...*We are very, very lucky here that people will listen to just about any idea...I go to our general manager and we'll talk about something and I'll come out and I won't necessarily have what I want but I know he will have listened and he will have considered and he is very, very conscious, as are all our senior management group now, of the impact of what they are doing on the staff...*(Easyway/a:12).

As at Safety, unofficial communications are seen as a problem:

PA: ...*killing rumour wherever we possibly can and making sure that we do communicate things to people. Making sure that they do understand what's going on within the organization...sometimes you can't always tell people what is going on. But if we can't tell them we will perhaps explain why. We would perhaps say to them 'Well, look, yes, there is something happening at the moment and as soon as we are able to we will keep you informed'. We can't always tell them but we try to...*(Easyway/a:12).

Across these organizations, then, training is described in management 'tales' in a variety of ways: as a morale boost, as task related, as the 'valid' product of a consultancy approach, as an investment in the workforce in a competitive labour market, as a medium for the transmission of political and organizational messages, and as preparation for the multi-skilling necessary for crossing occupational divides. The variety, however, obscures the common construction of the individual as *subject to* these practices. The individual is constructed as a resource and an input to the HR/personnel process who can be transformed - often in a psychological sense.

Communication is constructed as too important to be left to the 'grapevine'. However, it is not 'communication' as such which is constructed as a problem, but particular communications transmitted for organizational purposes. These include controlled political and cultural messages, discipline, prescription, partial information and censored information. The individual is constructed by these 'tales' as manageable through controlled communications.

Measurement is constructed in many ways and these managers use it for measuring different things - such as the achievement of objectives, training, the inputs and outputs of a process, or communications. It is constructed as part of the role of the personnel function, as information, as a means to cost cutting, and as a means of focussing attention on particular aspects of work. Measurement also contributes towards the construction of

individuals as objects of a discourse in which they are measurable, enumerable, and calculable through appraisal and monitoring.

Tales of training, measurement and communications, therefore, illustrate how organizations, work and workers might be ‘calculated’ through measurement, appraisal, and monitoring and how the workforce might be manipulated, psychologically and physically, through the rational ‘programming’ of training and communications initiatives.

(vii) Tales of organization

Tales of organization told by these HR/personnel managers include ‘tales’ of culture and of structuring. In these ‘tales’ the organization is constructed as controllable through various HR/personnel practices as it is changed by management and adapted to requirements in a cultural and/or a structural sense. As noted in the discussion of the prescriptive literature, organization is not constructed as an object in isolation, but in relation to the other key objects in distinct and particular ways. These ‘tales’ of the organization also construct environment and individual as objects.

Biscuits manufacture, market, and sell biscuits. As noted in previous ‘tales’ the Company Employee Relations Manager thinks the most important challenge facing the company is the change of power of the key multiples in their ability to influence the market place and prices. Because of the current economic climate the competitive and cost pressures on the business are greater now than they have ever been. He constructs the organization as an entity in a hostile environment through which it can be moved by ‘strategy’: that is, *‘the plans by which you set the direction in which the business will move’*.

The corporate strategy at Biscuits is to improve market share and to ensure that the *‘integrity of the brands’* is maintained in the consumer’s mind. To achieve that objective Biscuits needs to be the highest quality, lowest-cost producer, and organization (i.e.

restructuring and flexibility), performance and measurement are seen as key elements in achieving it.

Biscuits is '*moving towards a less structured management...functionalised management structures*' in order to drive responsibility down to the lowest possible levels. They chose to restructure because they want to try to concentrate effort on the measurable dimensions of the business in order to have closer control of the cost and to get people to take more responsibility. The belief is that through this policy '*we can drive more efficiency. And therefore be more competitive*'. The aim is to improve efficiency by getting everybody to contribute more. The restructuring is being introduced where and when opportunities arise with, for example, the introduction of new equipment.

The other structural features of Biscuits are concerned with trends towards less clear cut divisions between the tasks of skilled and unskilled occupations, and the development of frameworks for initiatives such as job evaluation schemes. Both these structural features involve developing joint working relationships with unions.

These 'tales' from Biscuits construct the organization as programmable (through strategy, planning, structuring, measurement) in an environment where investment finance, consumers, and major customers hold considerable power and the economic situation is increasing pressure on costs. The individual is constructed as capable of contributing more efficiency. This is to be achieved through programmatic attempts to erode demarcations, to increase responsibility, and to concentrate effort on certain measurable parts of the business.

Bio-Tech Screens is the '*leading natural products drug discovery company in the world*'. The Head of HR at Bio-Tech Screens makes it plain that Bio-Tech is a small but growing organization, with a flat structure, and a '*true*' small core resource of high calibre handling a high intellect:

GA: ...*you can almost take the way the business is run out of the textbook in terms of how businesses will be perceived to be run in the future* (Bio-Tech Screens/a:2).

The size of the organization is important because people cover a number of different roles: the '*calibre*' of people is important because they need to be able to handle more than one or two roles. Unlike large organizations, Bio-Tech has not had the opportunity to double up internally when someone is absent on sick or maternity leave. However, the growth of the organization makes the calibre of people a continuing issue because certain roles which had been the responsibility of just one person are now covered by two or three people and this requires a better definition of responsibilities. At Bio-Tech it is suggested that '*the culture, the values and beliefs are the important things*' because everybody is dependent on each other and dependent on managers in a '*leadership sense*'.

The structure at Bio-Tech Screens is also linked to attributes of the founder as a good networker among scientists. This has had '*nuances*' for the way the organization is structured in terms of being line-management driven or programme driven and whether it should split into divisions or be driven from a multi-disciplinary output side. The networking capabilities of the founder led to the development of a flat organization with a small core internal resource and a large number of collaborators, consultants, and contractors. It is described as being run on '*almost classic Charles Handy lines*'. The Head of HR thinks that in a lot of ways the flat structure of Bio-Tech Screens is '*more complex to manage than a traditional hierarchical organization*'. With a flat organization '*you don't have set strata of people or levels of rewards...but you try to balance the consistency with the individualism of the approach*'.

The construction of the organization in these 'tales' - as flat, with a true small core resource, much influenced by the founder, small but growing - is important because of the roles that are established for the HR/personnel function and other managers. The relationships, internal and external, are constructed as dependencies or partnerships which require skillful managing. Such a construction emphasises cultural manipulation.

Easyway is an international direct sales organization which sells a wide range of products but is best known for household goods. The organization is presented as *'totally different to anybody else'* as an explanation for their differences from *'normal'* organizations, particularly in the way that they have restructured by installing a hierarchy instead of flattening the structure, in the controversial and specialized nature of their business and the poor reputation the industry has, and in their working arrangements and objectives. Easyway is portrayed as unique both in the way that they operate and in terms of their culture as an organization. There are several references to what *'normal organizations'* are like in order to compare and contrast them with Easyway. The Inland Revenue is used as an example of an organization which, like Easyway, is involved in specialized and controversial activities. In addition, the work processes of normal organizations are characterized in a rational manner:

PA: *...It's not like a normal company where you can say, 'This is my team. This is what I have to do with them to ensure that, you know, we hit the mission statement and we become whatever it is we are supposed to be doing'...* (Easyway/a:9).

In contrast to what are characterized as *'normal organizations'*, Easyway did not flatten the organization but did *'the reverse'*. They did not have a hierarchy and that lack caused some major concerns. First, they had many people reporting to a senior manager and that was not seen as the most effective use of his time. Second, they lacked a first line management structure at a time of rapid growth. Third, people did not know where they stood in the organization as it had grown and lacked direction. Fourth, they had people doing jobs as managers but without the autonomy, without budgetary control, without recognition and authority, and without the titles. Fifth, there were problems with succession management. The appointment of a new general manager was an opportunity to put a hierarchical structure in place.

There has always been a focus on communication via teams at Easyway, but this was changed and developed to meet the needs of the organization when the general

manager left. At the same time rapid growth was highlighting the difficulties of not having a first line management structure. These challenges were compounded by a period during which the organization was *'run by committee'*.

At Easyway the term 'culture' is understood as:

PA: *...the way we are. It's the way we operate and the expectations that we have of people who work for us. We do have very high expectations of our employees. We do expect them to work 110% - and that's an average employee... (Easyway/a:11).*

The unifying 'tale' of culture runs through much of the interview at Easyway, from recruiting the right kind of person:

PA: *...It's almost as important to be an Easyway person as it is to be able to do the role for which you are applying. That's our culture (Easyway/a:1),*

through the methods for maintaining commitment, enthusiasm and open-mindedness:

PA: *I wouldn't say we have strict written policies. Again it goes back to the culture of the company. It goes back to the senior management down really. So that we would expect our senior managers to create an environment whereby people feel that they are comfortable with that... (Easyway/a:3),*

to restructuring:

PA: *...I think again because of the uniqueness in the way we operate and our culture as an organization, although we have a hierarchy in place, it's almost aesthetic... (Easyway/a:8).*

The 'tale' of culture constructs an *'Easyway person'* as flexible, committed, enthusiastic, open-minded, giving, etc., and constructs a management role in creating the right environment and structure in which employees are encouraged to question, to find direction and to become as broad as possible as they develop in a *'sharing experience'* of entrepreneurialism. The 'tale' constructs the organization in terms of a hierarchy within which people can gain rewards, recognition and a clear career path. The construction of the organization in this way contrasts not just with the fashion for 'flatter' structures, but with the construction of the individual as flexible.

RRM is a marketing company which has traditionally have been known as a 'below-the-line' agency but which has now responded to the market and to clients by providing an integrated service, including a 24 hour/7day week response mechanism for television and

newspaper advertisements, loyalty cards for supermarkets, credit card airmiles schemes, and direct mail/direct marketing. Their clients are aiming to build loyalty in their customers.

RRM has three divisions, one 40 miles away from the other two. It is not practical at the present time to merge onto one site, mainly because of labour market considerations. However, to ease communications they have taken out some layers from the organization to try to ease managerial reporting lines. In terms of mission, they are aiming at coming together as an integrated company to sell their whole range of services to clients. This integration reflects what could be seen as a restructuring of the industry while the new mission is seen as a response to the demands of clients and the market.

The most important challenge is change - the organization is expanding at a '*phenomenal rate*' and the culture of the organization and the mission of the organization are changing. The new mission is to generate higher revenue from fewer, larger clients and the challenge is seen as communicating change to all staff.

Culture, mission, and communication are closely linked at RRM where, in the context of rapid growth and change in the industry, the challenge is to communicate the change in culture/mission to a workforce across three geographically spread divisions and across staff who operate 24 hours/seven days a week. The mission is to generate higher turnover from less clients, which involves clients using '*more bits*' of the integrated service that RRM can provide now that 'above-the-line' and 'below-the-line' boundaries in the industry have faded.

In order to overcome the communication challenges, RRM relies on culture:

QA: *...It's making sure that the culture here is very much 'We talk to people', rather than we send memos...the managerial style is informal so that it is an open door policy here...So it is getting that culture right so that people are comfortable with talking of, discussing of, sharing opinions, and coming to... (RRM:10).*

However, as was noted in the discussion of communications there are challenges involved with how that culture is communicated to those on evening shifts. Communication

and culture are, therefore, inextricably linked at RRM because the culture has to be communicated but, at the same time, the culture is used as a medium of communication.

At RRM the HR/personnel manager constructs the organizational culture as largely the outcome of the location of sites and the nature of the work. However, the organization is constructed as programmable in the sense that it can be changed by a new mission and a new culture transmitted through various communications practices.

Brokers is an insurance broking organization/international financial services organization acting as intermediaries between clients and the insurance markets. Their most important challenge is represented as effecting a successful transition from being a highly traditional institution working for commissions into a more professional consultancy practice organization. The challenge for the Director of Human Resource Development is to change the profile of the employee base to reflect that transition.

The transition itself is represented as being necessitated by the effects of mergers which have increased the number of shareholders, by poor performance in a declining market, and by succession management failures, all manifesting themselves in what analysts saw as a profits crisis. The halving of the share price is described as *'a kind of crisis event at the end of a long-term period of turmoil'*. The transition/restructuring followed a report by management consultants who provided a *'view'* about market segmentation. This resulted in rationalization (job loss) and reorganization of the group into smaller business units.

Following a profits crisis and succession problems Brokers rationalized and restructured the organization to give it a different shape, different-sized and more manageable business units, and a consultancy approach. This involved divestment, a reduction in the size of the workforce (by around 8%), the granting of autonomy to geographical areas, and, of particular concern to the HR Development department, a halving of staff in training departments, the merging of the two training departments into

one, and the centralization of the HR function. The organization took this course after a report from management consultants who provided a '*view about market segmentation*'. The aim of the restructuring was to increase revenue and improve cost reduction.

The organization is constructed at Brokers as being capable of being changed structurally, through divestment and redundancies, to meet financial targets. This '*tale*' also constructs a role for HRM/personnel in changing the '*profile*' of the employee base to match the new structure.

Import Motors is an importer of Japanese cars and are mainly concerned with administration. The company is half owned by their Japanese manufacturer/ supplier but they do not have any Japanese working practices. The personnel manager acknowledges that their Japanese directors may experience a '*culture shock*' working at Import Motors. The absence of Japanese working practices is explained in terms of the work process at Import Motors - i.e. administrative rather than manufacturing. Import Motors is compared with a Japanese competitor who has a manufacturing base nearby:

ZA: ...*You have only got to go to [competitor] down the road and they really are run by the Japanese and the way they work it's, err, - they do the exercises in the morning and singing and what have you. So I don't think we will ever be run like that. Fortunately...* (Import Motors/a:6).

XYZ News is presented as an international news organization - not the market leader but '*number two*'. While the '*one thing that is important is meeting the deadline*' this manager locates the most important challenge they are facing in the future: the introduction of new, and not yet available, technology which will open '*all sorts of possibilities...and change the whole skill base of a whole tranche of employees*'.

There have already been a number of changes in the industry which have led to considerable job reductions and a diminished role for the unions. In preparation for new technology, some of the workforce is being trained to multi-skill across each others divides and they are being reorganized into teams ('*bureaus*'). At XYZ News, the term '*culture*' is used to refer to the effects of the structure of the organization - previously the old vertical

structures which have been removed and the traditional demarcations (*'no one would ever dream of offering assistance across the departments'*), and more recently the bureaus in which demarcations will disappear and *'people will be expected to help one another out'* in other teams.

XYZ News was characterized by vertical, departmental, sectional structures which have now been taken away:

XA: ...*We've taken the in-house editors, the out of house editors, and the crews, who were three separate sections and we have now put them together as one section under one manager...* (XYZ News/a:6).

The old structure had meant that people were not providing interdepartmental assistance.

Without the vertical structures people are expected to *'help one another out'* as the traditional demarcations *'break down'*. The future prospects for the introduction of new technology have encouraged the organization to start to train for multi-skilling (of journalists and technicians), and it is attempting to import the culture change of role swapping - apparently developing spontaneously in external bureaus in Glasgow and Brussels - into the main building. This has involved reorganizing the main building workforce into small bureaus which are autonomous and self-sufficient, but whose members will be expected to work in other bureaus as and when workloads shift.

Following the *'Into the 90s'* changes, there has also been a switch from annualized hours contracts to undefined contracts (unlimited hours). This puts responsibilities on managers to treat employees in *'a fair and equitable way'* and provides a role for the union as a *'first back stop'* for management excesses and to see *'fair play'*. Beyond this the unions, accommodated in discourse by common interests, *'have very little say in the running of the organization'*. However, the nature of the service XYZ News provides has organizational effects:

XA: ... *last Friday the science bureau was very pushed because of the space shuttle or the interest in that - they were then extremely busy. There wasn't a health story on Friday, so the health bureau were doing nothing in particular...* (XYZ News/a:6).

Changing the culture is the chief role of the Director of Human Resources at XYZ. News and culture change is understood in two ways. First, it involves changing a reactive personnel department and industrial relations department into a proactive personnel department which looks after the staff and the staff needs with a greater emphasis on welfare. Second, within the wider organization the existing culture is understood in terms of traditional demarcations which are predicted to break down. This means the old vertical structures can be removed and that work can be reorganized in teams. Traditional divides are already being crossed by multi-skilled workers in external bureaux and the challenge is to import that culture change into the main building.

This 'tale' of organization constructs people as resistant to change but, nonetheless changeable through multi-skill training and through necessity. The organization itself is constructed as changeable because of technological change and as changeable through the importation of a different culture - a construction for which anecdotal evidence is provided. Culture is manipulated through structural initiatives (i.e. moving to teamworking in *bureaus*) which are presented as the main role of HR/personnel.

Safety make and sell fire extinguishers in the UK and they are the market leader. The most important challenge is to maintain and improve the financial performance - which it aims to do through setting annual budgets for sales, orders and profit levels. They are trying to manage both the human and physical resources to achieve that:

HA: *...we say in this company it's about building teams and managing change. You know, it's a phrase but it is very true...* (Safety:10).

The controls on the resources in terms of information are greater than in the past because of detailed computerized reports about financial performance, sales and orders for every four week period which can cover the whole company, the region, the area, and 'down to the man'.

Safety employs 1050 people. About 600 of these are employed in the extinguisher division and work from home selling and servicing extinguishers. There is also a product

and services division, which provides extinguishers to the trade and designs and installs large fire systems, and two manufacturing sites. The personnel department - three personnel professionals - work in the group HQ.

The Head of Personnel and Training says that *'it is important that there are open channels from the directors of the company down to various people working at whatever level'* but is unable to further his beliefs on the way that communications are dealt with in the organization. He argues for a formal communications system as used by many stores and many organizations but he contrasts this view with an account of how the majority of organizations operate:

HA: *...you know, Joe tells Harry, Harry tells Bill and then Bill gets it wrong and tells Margaret and Margaret gets it in the neck - and the whole thing goes awry* (Safety:7).

He thinks that *'it is a relatively simple business'* but believes that the lessons have not been learnt from experience. Consequently the organization is *'falling for the same problems time and time and time again'*.

The 'tales' of organization at Safety construct the organization as changeable and controllable through the manipulation of physical and human resources. The techniques to manipulate the organization include new technology and communications policies. The 'real' role of HR/personnel is constructed as a consequence of organizational change:

HA: *...advising and consulting with the senior management and the people in question how this is going to affect them, why we want to change their job title, why we want to change their area, why their package will change, or why we no longer require them...* (Safety:10).

These 'tales' related by HR/personnel managers construct organization as an object of discourse which can be changed by management and adapted to requirements in a cultural and/or a structural sense. In this construction organizational change is brought about by factors such as new technology, communications policies, ownership, and/or managerial decision making (such as a change in mission). Such 'tales' construct organizations as capable of being steered in a particular direction to a new market position.

Conclusion

In this chapter discourse in private sector organizations has been examined in terms of several 'tales' which have been told by managers. In these interviews managers do appear to be telling a number of interconnected, story-like 'tales' (which take the form of anecdotes, metaphors, and/or myths, etc.) and they utilize numerous rhetorical devices to establish them as 'true'. It has been argued that these 'tales' indicate the way in which the key objects (environment, organization, individual) are constructed by HR/personnel managers. The variety in the 'tales' told by these managers has been emphasised and is important because it indicates that a 'traditional' approach to analysis would have some difficulty in capturing such variety and theorizing across organizations.

However, in the next chapter it will be demonstrated that, despite the variety in the telling of 'tales', managers order and align the three key objects in 'repertoires' which establish causal relations between the objects. It will be argued that the interviews with HR/personnel managers can be understood as a discourse in which they construct the two 'repertoires' identified in the analysis of the prescriptive literature and establish 'specific rationalities' which 'make sense' of organizational 'reality'.

CHAPTER SIX - THE CONSTRUCTION OF REPERTOIRES - THE PRIVATE SECTOR HR/PERSONNEL MANAGERS

In Chapter Five the construction of the key objects of discourse was examined in terms of 'tales' which indicate the way in which the key objects are 'known' by HR/personnel managers. The variety of 'tales' told by these managers has been emphasised. In this chapter it is argued that what HR/personnel managers are doing in the interviews is 'making sense' of organizational 'reality' by constructing 'specific rationalities'. It is argued that these 'specific rationalities' can be detected as an alignment and ordering of the key 'objects' in 'repertoires'. This chapter examines the extent to which the interviews with HR/personnel managers can be understood in terms of the construction of the two repertoires identified in the examination of the prescriptive literature (Repertoire A = environment → organization → individual, Repertoire B = environment → individual → organization). It is argued that, despite the variety in the 'tales', these repertoires demonstrate that HR/personnel managers in different organizations construct their 'specific rationalities' according to a common logic that is 'internal' to HRM discourse. This 'internal logic' can also be found in the prescriptive literature.

HR/personnel managers do not articulate these 'repertoires' in a straightforward fashion. The process of repertoire construction described in this chapter involves the establishment, by HR/personnel managers, of causal relationships between the key objects which order and align those objects. Such constructionist activities in discourse do not produce what Gordon terms a 'perfect correspondence' (1980:247) and is not 'hyper-rationalist' (Gordon:246), but is 'loose and approximate, and always mobile and indeterminate' (Miller and Rose 1990:10). It is argued that the process of repertoire construction provides the basis of the mutual constitution of problems and solutions which are always in a state of flux or in a continuous process of reconstitution (Knights and Morgan 1991:267). This process, therefore, constructs an ongoing role for HRM/personnel managers.

While the interviews with these HR/personnel managers do not always perfectly correspond to the repertoire A/repertoire B distinction identified in the analysis of the prescriptive literature, it is argued that most of the interviews display a 'duality' in which repertoire A appears dominant but a second repertoire is additionally used for explanation and problematization.

The construction of the environment is crucial in a rhetorical (persuasive) sense to repertoire A because, as Grint (1994) suggests in the case of Business Process Reengineering, the world can be conveyed in discourse in such a way as to make certain policies appear as an appropriate response. Grint argues that:

'It is clearly advantageous to argue that blame for the current state of affairs lies in the actions of "the other" (i.e. foreign competition) if one is intending to persuade one's own customers of the viability of change' (1994:194).

However, the discourse of these managers indicates more than a 'rhetorical' construction of reality to persuade their own customers; it also involves the construction of ways of 'knowing' the environment as 'calculable' (if uncontrollable) and the organization and individual as 'calculable' and 'programmable' through measurement, performance monitoring, appraisals, training and communication.

Safety

The processes of alignment and ordering corresponding to repertoire A are demonstrated most clearly in the interview with the Head of Personnel and Training at Safety. In this first example the causal connections between the environment, the organization and the individual are asserted in the context of change. This scenario is contrasted with a 'tale' of market stability. In discussing the difference between HRM and personnel and the opportunities for a new input he argued that:

HA: ...the problem you've got, and this is where the world is always changing, the company is always changing, the market is always changing, if you could have constant market place and you knew that you were going to increase your business by a 10% each year for the next ten years and that you didn't have somebody biting at your heels to try and take the business away from you, it would be easier to plan perhaps for some of the programmes that you want to do. But because we do have to change quite rapidly, what a

lot of the personnel functions may end up doing, even human resources functions may end up doing, because there is a need to change, - change the shape of your organization, the structure of it and therefore it changes the people and their jobs - it's really advising and consulting with the senior management and the people in question how this is going to affect them, why we want to change their job title, why we want to change their area, why their package will change, or why we no longer require them... (Safety:10)

From the identification of environmental 'change' as the key problem this manager argues that the shape and structure of the organization must change - rapidly - and that this, therefore, changes people and their jobs. Furthermore, these causal connections establish the 'real' role of HR/personnel.

This account corresponds to repertoire A and the 'necessity' for change provides 'distance' from responsibility in the sense that the necessity for change is attributed to environmental factors. The desire to use a more programmatic approach is clear but would be conditional on a less competitive environment without somebody '*biting at your heels*' trying to take the business away.

In other parts of this interview are sections which display the 'eternal optimism' that people and organizations are programmable and that programmes could work better. In particular, the poor management decisions constructed in the 'tale' of the past leads to a set of problematizations - including quality of staff and staff retention - which can be improved by increased involvement of the personnel department in the form of coaching sessions, screening of applicants, the production of documentation, etc., with the aim of '*trying to cut out the errors*' of the past when recruitment was done in the field and was '*too loose*'. Similarly, training had been in the field in the past and had been used as '*a bit of a sweetener*'. The personnel department is taking greater control over the budget and is attempting to assess whether the investment in training has actually been worthwhile. The improvement of training involves the reinforcing of training/coaching by regional managers with documentation produced by the personnel department focused on what is trying to be achieved and how it should be measured. So the problematization (and 'distancing') of poor training practices in the past is matched by eternally optimistic training solutions: the

solution to the 'failure' of training is more centralized, documented, focused, budget-controlled, monitored and followed-up training.

The mutual constitution of problems and solutions at Safety can also be found in the account of the effects of new technology and the increased amount of information available. The computerization of sales/orders and financial performance reports means that the managers at Safety now receive monthly summaries for the whole company, the region, the area, and *'down to the man'*. This increased monitoring control causes problems in terms of *'quite significant stress'*, absence, and job loss. The solution offered is *'a little bit of discipline and being prescriptive'*. This involves increased and more specific training specifically related to the task in question and monitoring and following through that training by managers. So the stress caused by monitoring is to be solved by monitoring training.

Communication at Safety is problematized and offered as a solution in the context of *'the tremendous pressure on organisations now'*. He suggests that:

HA: *...If suddenly orders fall away in an area the temptation is to reduce the number of people you employ. It happens very quickly now. You don't go one or two years and then think about it, it will happen during the course of a year - suddenly things start to go wrong. One way you can protect profit is to release people...Because if the business isn't coming in - you're originally geared up to employ 1050 people in the organization because you believe you can do x amount of business...If that business suddenly drops no...you only employ those people in the first place to do that level of business. If the business isn't there, you cut back...Because of that pressure and the focus on the figures, sometimes we lose sight of what we are trying to achieve. You could turn round and say that one of the key things many companies have never really solved is this problem of communicating and motivating - not only to managers but to the staff in general... (Safety:5).*

In this case the problems are related to the very things that some might see as indicators of business success: Safety is the market leader in the whole of the UK. Because they have to cover the whole of the UK, there are communications problems as a large part of the service workforce operate from their own homes.

The alignment and ordering of the key objects in this way in this interview corresponds to repertoire A. It provides a rationality - *'I think it is a relatively simple*

business' - and the manager uses conditional logic (twice) to argue for a formal communication system. He backs up his argument with the 'evidence' of other organizations.

Repertoire B appears in this interview at Safety in an equally calculating manner - and with the same solution. Stress is a problem because a lot of the employees are '*ordinary people perhaps have got themselves in the job and they're struggling perhaps a bit*'; the solution in terms of the organization changing to meet the needs of these employees is formalised coaching, increased training budgets, more training specifically related to the task, and encouraging the managers to monitor training and to follow it through. Similarly, people are problematized in terms of communication: they are constructed as '*ordinary people*' and ,when left to their own devices, '*Joe tells Harry, Harry tells Bill...*' and the '*whole thing goes awry*'. Again, the solution is a *formal* (unrealized) communication system to beat the grapevine.

Rather than being contradictory, the two repertoires at Safety are complimentary in that they provide the same solutions. The needs of the organization and the needs of the employees are the same - monitoring, discipline, training, communication - and solutions can be found by the expertise of HR/personnel. In the processes of the 'distancing' of responsibility in cases where alternatives are denied (e.g. '*If the business isn't there, you cut back*') the 'duality' of the two repertoires ensures an ongoing role for such expertise in '*advising*' those subject to the effects of change. The two 'repertoires' position the HR/personnel manager as an expert which makes the centralization of personnel practices a 'rational' policy. In that process the manager is 'distanced' from the causes of change but owns the policy changes.. The monitoring and programming of people through centralization of documentation preparation, coaching, monitoring, checking and following through, provides the discipline and prescription necessary to meet challenge of maintaining and improving financial performance.

Bio-Tech Screens

Although Bio-Tech Screens is a different organization in many respects (e.g. size, structuring, etc.) which operates in a different kind of environment and employs a different kind of workforce, the process of the alignment and ordering of objects is still clear. Bio-Tech operates in a 'maze' of a business, an environment in which there are numerous other entities. They seek money from investors in a market place in which they must create an identity. Because they use investors' money they have to be '*pretty efficient*' with it and the company has, therefore, developed a flat organization with a large number of collaborators, consultants, and contractors. A flat organization is seen as requiring high calibre people with the potential to handle more than one or two roles. The relationship between a diverse market, a core/periphery organization, and a high calibre workforce creates its own problems:

'...I think in a lot of ways it's more complex to manage than a traditional hierarchical organization'

'...I've got so many exceptions to the rule, more exceptions to the rules than there are people actually following the rules'.

The 'tales' of the past (failed competitors, the founders' networking skills) reveal the importance of linking direction with HR/personnel policies and practices. Consideration of human resources is aligned with business and organization strategies and to the science 'side':

GA: *...we what we've got is a business strategy, then an organization strategy, then human resources - or human resourcing strategy...if we've got any one human strategy it's trying to mirror what's going to happen on the science side and on the business strategy... (Bio-Tech Screens/a:3).*

It is the necessity of 'mirroring' the science/business strategy that provides the justification for the core/periphery organization. Although there may be benefits for those in the periphery (e.g. experience, temps being treated as permanent, etc.) and although there is an organizational cost in terms of managing the periphery, the organization is clearly

'distanced' from responsibility for them. The organizational benefit is that those in the periphery can be kept '*at arms length*' and can be treated as variable costs as opposed to fixed costs.

The 'integration' of HR issues with business issues is also explicit in the role of the Head of Human Resources although which techniques are applicable remains '*wide open*'. His job is to '*Link strategic business issues to human resource issues, and solve problems, solve issues. Using whatever HR knowledge, techniques I need to*'.

The organization is seen as one that can move and be directed. However, this conceptualization of a directed, mobile organization in the environment is not seen as determining particular policies or practices - they are a result of particular business issues being better defined and translated into the organization. Central to the definition and translation of business issues is measurement of the quality of science going in, the quality of specialisms, and the quality of the outputs.

In repertoire A the way the business is run appears as rational enough to be taken '*out of the textbook*' and the alignment of objects is achieved through dependency, culture, values and beliefs:

GA: *...I think that the thing that drives us is the dependency of one upon another. I think we are all pretty dependent on each other and therefore in a multi disciplinary sense I think quite a number of members of staff are dependent on managers in a leadership sense because of their experience and to get them through this maze of business that we are in...a lot of our work depends on the performance of others within the organization therefore the culture - the values and beliefs are the important things* (Bio-Tech Screens/a:9).

Repertoire B features in as much as the workforce is 'known' in terms of occupational characteristics - '*scientists like to be trained, they are used to being trained*' - qualifications, and age/culture. 'Knowing' people in this way requires a variable approach to particular issues:

GA: *...you've got the sort of people who are going to respond to getting bonuses for achievement - then you might be into, what's the balance of bonus versus basic pay for that individual? Or you might be into a pattern of training or you might be into a motivational thing. So I don't close down any options to start with...* (Bio-Tech/a:10).

Repertoire B also appears to indicate some level of weakness where the organization is structured in response to individual needs:

GA: ...where hierarchy tends to exist is either where you've got systems of operations where you need some sort of supervisory thing or unfortunately, sometimes hierarchy exists where the individual isn't able to fulfil all the roles and therefore needs someone reporting to them who can specialise in one or another of those roles... (Bio-Tech/a:11).

However, such dependency on hierarchy rather than on managers and co-workers can be avoided by the expertise of HRM/personnel *'it throws it right back on the skills of the people again which is actually good news for human resources'*.

The alignment and ordering of the key objects (environment, organization, individual) establishes that high calibre personnel are required to run a flat organization that is itself necessary in the particular market in which Bio-tech operates. At the same time the key objects are aligned and ordered in the sense that the individuals (known in terms of occupation, age, qualifications, etc.) who work for the organization require an approach that takes account of their individuality. The HR/personnel manager is 'distanced' from the causes of change but is located by the two repertoires as an expert with the specialized and varied knowledge necessary in a structurally flat organization.

Brokers

At Brokers environment, organization, and individuals are constructed in a repertoire in which organizational restructuring is necessary to meet the challenges of a changed market. This restructuring means that there are new roles for employees, and these roles require changed behaviour. The most important challenge - effecting a successful transition from being a highly traditional institution into a consultancy practice organization - is constituted as a solution to the problem constructed in terms of the segmentation of a changed market. The failures of senior executives provide the rationale for increased attention to succession management and the influence of HRM is linked (by hope) to incoming executives. Furthermore, the HR development department is aligned with this

construction of 'reality' in that it is restructured to match the new structure and new competencies of the organization.

In the interview with the Director of HRD the organization is clearly located in the external environment between clients and the insurance markets. However, these environmental features do not appear as determinants of the organization or individuals. Instead, the organization seems to be mainly affected by two other key groups. The first group is the Stock Market analysts who went '*berserk*' after Brokers posted first quarter financial results which were down on the moderately good results of the previous year. The second key group is the competitors who earn far more out of consultancy fees than do Brokers.

The effect of these two groups has been the appointment of management consultants with a particular view of market segmentation. Subsequently there have been personnel changes at the top of the organization, rationalizations, a restructuring into different shape/different size business units, a changed role for the HRD department, and a changed role for other managers. This changed role for managers was not matched by changed behaviour and this provided the focus for an organizational development approach from the HRM department rather than '*old-fashioned training*'.

Organizational change is seen as inevitable by senior management because of the environmental change:

UA: *...I then did quite a bit of research amongst senior people, trying to get from them what they expected, what kind of organization they expected to emerge over the next 3-5 years... And what the message I got quite loud and clear was that we could not, as an organization, whether it was consultancy we went into or whatever we could, we would be wrong to rely on our traditional sources of revenue, and expect growth, and expect... to grow at a competitive rate. We couldn't do it... (Brokers:6).*

The impact of the environmental changes on the organization is not understated. A different '*world*' is expected to impact on behaviour:

UA: *...if we were going to get into that world, what kind of people, how would people behave in the organization, what would be the differences from the way they behave now, and what might give rise to those differences. And obviously things like their level of*

ability would be an issue, or type of ability, their general level of education and so on... (Brokers:6).

This account is presented as an '*interpretation*' backed by a '*little bit of objectivity*'.

The use of the past (to illustrate the change in the environment, the corporate failure to adapt, the failure of decision-making, and the failure by Brokers to heed the warnings of potential difficulties caused by a lack of succession management) problematizes the organization in the environment in terms of restructuring, changing the employee profile, and leadership. The effects of the merger (i.e. more shareholders) have meant that '*there has been a huge pressure on us to maintain dividend in what is a highly competitive market place*' - increased revenue and the reduction of costs have become necessary. The consequences for the organization have been cost reductions in the form of workforce reductions, rationalizations, and divestment.

This account corresponds with what this manager sees as a '*coping rather than determining*' personnel approach which passively and reactively adapts the resource mix '*in line with effectively a continuous stream of management decisions*'. This rational and objective example of repertoire A in which the trigger of change appears to be a perceived profits crisis can be contrasted with a second repertoire. The second repertoire in this interview - the '*other part*' of the '*story*' - does not correspond exactly to repertoire B although it does imply that a focus on HR matters may have avoided the mergers.

This second repertoire has two components. The first is the idea of getting '*general management thinking about HR consequences of strategic and operational decisions up front, at the same time as financial consequences*' and is linked to power at board level and two or three levels below, particularly in relation to the power of the financial advice. HRM in this sense is a determinant of the strategy of the organization.

The second component of this repertoire involves the story of the failure of an individual (who had been seen as the successor to the chairman) to develop beyond the single, narrow function in which he had spent most of his time. It was seen that this person

'was not humanly capable' of doing the job of the chairman. This story is used to argue that, while the changes were the result of a profits crisis, there had been an internal succession management planning crisis that, had it been addressed earlier, may have led to the profits crisis being avoided. The solution to such problems is identified in terms of HR strategy: the individual is constructed as a particular kind of resource that requires long-term planning. A further example of repertoire B can be found in the 'tale' of training in which training is refocused to cater for the needs of particular groups or individuals.

In repertoire A, while blame for the 'profits crisis' seems to be accepted by the organization, management responsibility is 'distanced' by citing as the main agents of change the Stock Market analysts and the competitors who earn higher consultancy fees. In repertoire B, despite the story of individual 'failure', the responsibility for the failure to have management succession planning in place is attributed to the organization which had not recognized the strategic importance of HRM (the failure is not associated with succession policies themselves). However, this organizational responsibility is 'distanced' - temporally - because this is revealed in a 'tale' of the past. Time is also a significant feature of this repertoire in another sense. Five years is suggested as a reasonable time span for an HR strategy. In this construction the organization is determined by the individual in as much as the HR input into the corporate strategy is determined by the particular nature of individuals as a resource.

Easyway

As has been noted, at Easyway *'out there'* is constructed as something considerably different from the constructions of the environment in interviews at other organizations. For Easyway *'out there'* consists of the sales force; that is the *'distributors'*. However, there is still a process in which the *'out there'*, the organization, and the workforce are aligned and ordered in a 'rational' construction corresponding to repertoire A. In this case, as at Bio-Tech Screens, the continuing influence of the founders of the organization plays a key part

in the process of repertoire construction, for they *'built their business based on people, because of direct selling and distributors are people who want to make money and become entrepreneurs'*. The vision of entrepreneurialism in this heroic tale *'filters through'* to the people who work for the company. *'Out there'* is problematized at Easyway in terms of something that needs managing, and the management of *'out there'* is seen as the process with which everybody in the organization (with the exception of the personnel manager) is involved.

The uniqueness of the organization and the context problematize recruitment because that uniqueness requires particular kinds of people - Easyway people - to work in what is seen as a controversial and specialized organization. The right people with the right qualities are out there and can be found or attracted to Easyway. The problematization of the organization (as specialized, controversial, etc.) and the solution (recruit Easyway people) are mutually constituted in a narrative of uniqueness that runs through accounts of the past, of people, of communications, culture, structure, distributors, and organization.

The process of repertoire construction is reinforced by repeated reference to the uniqueness of the organization. It is distanced from what would happen in a *'normal organization'* by reference to the nature of direct sales (*not* pyramid selling), and the poor reputation that form of selling has. This account of organizational difference is significant because it links this repertoire A to repertoire B. The key *'tale'* is of structuring.

Easyway has installed a hierarchy where none previously existed. This is the basis of repertoire B and provides a context in which the structural problem and the solution are mutually constituted. This introduction of a hierarchy is a response to what the employees wanted and to the jobs they were already doing. The construction of people as individuals with individual needs, and contrasting this view with a view of people as commodities, establishes a necessary link between the nature of people and the way that the organization is constructed. This repertoire identifies personnel at Easyway as *'good old fashioned stuff'*.

Import Motors

In the interview with the personnel manager at Import Motors the environment impacts on the organization mainly through the exchange rate which puts on pressure through price and leads directly to a policy of non-replacement of people who leave. In turn this leads to high stress areas which require departmental reorganizations and provide a *'golden opportunity'* to re-examine job descriptions. The individuals are aligned with the pressure on the organization in terms of stress that is monitored through appraisals and treated through the welfare role of the personnel manager. The organization and individuals are united by the common problem of the exchange rate.

However, in the second repertoire, the organization and individuals are problematized by a lack of communication and a lack of reassurance over worries about succession and ownership. An organizational response is required. The morale of the workforce and the need to be seen to be doing something about the effects of environmental factors is a recurring feature of this repertoire which has the effect of aligning and ordering the key objects through the common difficulties faced by the organization and its staff.

The personnel manager sees the result of these difficulties in both repertoires in terms of stress and the solutions in terms of a welfare role for personnel that includes her availability to speak to staff about problems and her arranging of referrals to the company doctor. Stress is relieved by making employees *'feel as if we are showing care for that person and we are going to try to do something to help them'*.

RRM

For RRM the environment is made up of demanding clients and a changing industry (i.e. marketing). The needs of clients are expressed in terms of retaining existing customers and attracting new customers. The nature of the industry has changed in that the distinction between 'above the line' and 'below the line' marketing has disappeared. This has provided opportunities for RRM to offer a wider range of services and an *'integrated'* service -

presented as a *'response to what our clients are saying, to what the market is saying'*. The necessary organizational change is represented as a change in mission and culture:

QA: ...*The new mission is that we come together as an integrated company so that we are selling our services to clients across the whole range...So it's all about bigger clients but using more bits of us* (440a:2).

The changing organizational culture and mission are problematized in terms of difficulties in communication - a particular challenge because of the geographical distance between sites and because of the 24 hours/7 days a week operation. Managerial responsibility is 'distanced' by reference to customer requirements as the relationship between the environment and the organization is established. The implications of this relationship are practices that attempt to manipulate the workforce culturally through policies such as a monthly team briefing with written feedback, and the creation of an internal marketing post, and the recruitment of more experienced and better skilled people.

Repertoire B is addressed through the *'old phrase'* that *'we are only as good as our people'* and, in the context of a competitive market for labour, results in an organizational response that includes IIP accreditation, a focus on rewards, and layering to ease reporting lines.

The problem of communication is to be addressed by culture and the problem of culture is how to communicate it. The problem of communicating the new culture/mission is solved through culture and includes the eternal optimism that improvements can be achieved through formal team briefing, better recruitment, layering, and changing the personnel function.

The two repertoires are conceptualized as a *'jigsaw'* of *'the individual needs of people, the departmental needs, and also the corporate needs'* that must be fitted together. Organization and individual are, therefore, aligned with each other in terms of the *'jigsaw'* of needs and in terms of communicating change and culture change. They are aligned and

ordered in relation to the environment as the organization and employees respond structurally and individually to what the market and customers are *'saying'*.

Biscuits

The interviews at Biscuits and XYZ News are distinctive in terms of this analysis because there seems to be virtually no trace of repertoire B in either. However, they are also distinctive and alike in that accounts of relations with unions are strong features of both. The alignment and ordering of objects in these interviews is reinforced by constructions of common interest.

At Biscuits the alignment and ordering of the changing market, the changing company, and the changed workforce requirements was presented as a challenge to both the organization and the union: it had resulted in changed jobs, new things to measure (objectives), and new ways to measure them (appraisal). In the interview with the Company Employee Relations Manager at Biscuits the (possibly) post-recessional economic environment contains changed 'customers' (i.e. the *'key multiples'*) who have power in *'their ability to influence the market place and prices in particular'*. Such influence pressurizes organizations, and the pressures are *'greater now than they've ever been'*. The pressures include competition and cost, such as the cost of raw materials. Within this environment organizational culture concerns what a business considers to be its' style of direction and is linked to objectives and strategy. For Biscuits, strategy is the plans which set the direction in which the business will move and includes initiatives or particular activities by which the organization arrives at its' long term interests. The key aim at Biscuits is to be more competitive in order to keep the business growing and the corporate strategy is to improve market share and to maintain the *'integrity of the brands'* in the mind of the consumer through being the highest quality, lowest-cost producer. HRM/personnel issues of organization and performance are constructed as key elements in achieving this.

The environment - characterized as in recession, dominated by the key multiples, and which has a market-specific sense of quality - is presented as something through which the organization can be directed by strategic planning towards its' long-term interests. This has implications for the conceptualization of organization: there would be little point in conceptualizing the organization as goal-directed if the environment does not permit such movement.

However, there are also three uncontrollable factors which have direct implications for the way work is done at Biscuits: investment, time, and the way things are. These provide managerial 'distance' from the consequences of managerial initiatives. First, the investment programming in new equipment naturally drives the need to be as efficient as possible. Second, Biscuits is a different organization now to what it was twenty years ago and people are doing different jobs. Third, flexibility is seen as '*necessary*' and as '*the direction in which life is having to go*'.

In this repertoire investment leads to better ways of working and necessarily requires flexibility, flexibility is the direction in which life is having to go, and time leads to different jobs. All involve changes in work that are dictated by uncontrollable environmental factors and which can, therefore, be 'distanced' from managerial responsibility. The managerial 'distance' from the workplace consequences of investment is emphasised by reference to what is 'natural' - it is investment programming in new equipment, not management, which '*naturally drives the need*' to be efficient. Similarly, management is 'distanced' from responsibility for changes in jobs by the unmanageable passage of time. The statement of the obvious - '*we're a slightly different organization now*' - further reinforces the managerial 'distance'. In this repertoire it is not management but 'investment' that directly necessitates flexibility, and which indirectly - through new technology - requires change.

Biscuits as an organization is constructed in relation to a pressurizing environment and to individuals through policies and practices concerned with performance measurement, the driving down of responsibility to the lowest levels, and the improvement of the efficiency of the organization through the efficiency of each individual employee. These policies include job evaluation, sick pay schemes, performance related pay, monitoring, appraisals, job design, and restructuring. These are integrated with the corporate strategy in the sense that organization and performance are seen as key elements in becoming the highest quality, lowest-cost producer. The exclusion of other accounts of 'reality' at Biscuits is articulated through reference to common interests and their acceptance as unions are positioned as partners in the business who recognize the inevitability of change.

So the strategic and conscious organization is constructed as helpless ('distanced' from responsibility) in the face of uncontrollable environmental factors such as investment, new technology, time, and life. The organization is positioned in discourse in relation to these factors and the uncontrollable consequences that manifest themselves as flexibility, different jobs, better ways of operating, the blurring of boundaries between jobs, and so on. These uncontrollable consequences are constituted as strategic HRM solutions as they are articulated in terms of the policies and practices of measurement, evaluation, appraisal, restructuring, and the driving down of responsibility.

The only indication of repertoire B is the reference to driving down responsibility to the lowest levels. Although this could be seen as part of a claim that giving people responsibility structures the organization to provide opportunities to utilize their skills, the HR/personnel manager at Biscuits does not provide such connections.

XYZ News

The interview with XYZ News provides the strongest evidence of a 'strategic' approach in the form of the *'Into the 90s'* policy. This preceded the decline of union power and introduced changes in working practices. However, environment, organization, and

individuals are brought into alignment and ordered in the interview with the Director of Human Resources at XYZ News through the inevitable progress of new technology. Technology is *'moving forward'*, breaking down traditional demarcations, making multi-skilling the only option and teamworking the new means of organizing work. Consequently, *'people have got to learn that they are part of a team'*, they must go *'that little step further'* and *'start thinking'* in terms of multi-skilling. In this context HR/personnel, which had been reactive, has to become proactive in looking after staff needs and welfare whilst training must focus on the new technology.

New technology is simultaneously constituted as the most important challenge, as the determinant of a new organizational structure and culture, and as the determinant of people and jobs. Thus, it provides the *'distancing'* of managerial responsibility because there is nothing anyone can do. The past is problematized in terms of powerful unions and the solution of the present accommodates a *'hardly relevant'* union in a partnership working with management with a new role.

Summary and Conclusions

In these two chapters it has been argued that interviews with HR/personnel managers can be understood in terms of the construction of *'repertoires'* in which key objects are constructed, ordered and aligned as the interviewees *'make sense'* of *'reality'* by constructing *'rationality'* (a *'specific rationality'*, a *'local rationality'*, an *'internal logic'*).

The previous chapter focused on the construction of the key objects (environment, organization, individual) and described the interviews in terms of management *'tales'*. The emphasis in the description of *'tales'* was on variety. This chapter focused on how this variety of *'tales'* could be understood as *'rationally'* connected in management discourse through causal relations being asserted between the key objects. It has been argued that this process can be demonstrated by the ordering and alignment of the key objects in two repertoires that correspond (although not exactly) to the two repertoires identified in the

prescriptive literature. In this 'duality' of repertoires, problems and solutions are mutually constituted. The problems and the solutions (in the form of the practices and policies of HRM/personnel) are, therefore, 'integrated' into an organizational 'reality' and 'rationality' within which they 'make sense'.

It was argued that, in the process of construction, managers 'distanced' themselves from the consequences of management initiatives while claiming control over (i.e. ownership of) HR/personnel practices. Furthermore, constructionist activities position HR/personnel managers and practices within organizations. The articulation of the two repertoires positions HR/personnel managers as 'rational' and 'objective' experts with specialized HRM 'knowledge'.

In addition to positioning themselves through the practices of 'distancing' and repertoire/object construction in these interviews, HR/personnel managers positioned themselves in response to questions about the difference between HRM and personnel. For example, at Easyway the manager defined the role of personnel as '*good old fashioned stuff*' by comparing it to HRM:

'...To me, what I'm doing here is more personnel linked and to me personnel is the good old fashioned stuff. Human resource is to me about strategic planning - one of those things that are vital - but they have a place to sit within thinking about people and to me human resource managers...are very much involved in the business end of the business and perhaps are losing sight of - and this is very generalist - losing sight of actually what people are and their individual needs. And I think there is a danger that you start to look at people as commodities in the same way as you would your computer equipment. That to me is the difference. And I'll probably be called a human resources manager by next week, but there you go. Working for an American is very hard' (Personnel Manager, Easyway).

At Brokers the difference between personnel and HRM was thought to be important in the way they are implemented. In this example HRM is positioned at the front of strategic decision making:

'Other than the name?...I believe there is a very strong difference but the difference lies not in the name but in the way it is implemented. Personnel first, because I will distinguish personnel and training. John Storey had a typology of personnel management types - one he described as the handmaiden of management I think. And I think a huge amount of personnel management still is in handmaiden mode. It sweeps up, it cleans up messes. It is not involved at the front of strategic decisions, it's not consulted on strategic decisions, it's

expected to cope with the after effects of strategic decisions in terms of people...Now I see a major difference between that approach...to being a genuinely consultative, advice giving and strategy-forming part of the organization, because the true HR management end I would expect the human resources, the most senior human resources person to gain as much time from senior management in terms of giving advice as the chief financial officer or the chief financial officer's financial staff would today. When you look at the strategic decisions in this organization we tend to see a relationship between managers who are insurance brokers with some advice and guidance mainly from the financial people - not from the human resources people. Human resources come in much later when recruitment decisions have to be made...' (Director of Human Resource Development, Brokers).

Although the interviewee at RRM thought they meant the same thing (*'It's all the same personnel and human resource'*) his job title - Personnel Consultant - was *'a reflection of what HR is all about in this organization'*. This meant *'primarily advising and assisting line managers to manage their people better'* but it also meant that HR/personnel comes in behind, rather than at, the decision-making stage.

As with the 'tales' in which objects are constructed, the views of managers talking about the HRM/personnel distinction varied greatly. However, what united these views was a common concern with the position and role of HR/personnel managers and policies within organizations. Such positioning is an issue within the prescriptive literature (e.g. Georgiades 1990, Nixon 1989, Skinner, Grandi and Martin 1989a, 1989b, Sparrow and Pettigrew 1988, Spry 1991) and will be considered further at the end of the research report.

However, the main finding of these chapters is that HR/personnel managers do discursively construct organizationally specific and varied 'realities' that 'make sense': causal relationships are established between the key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) which are then aligned and ordered in 'specific rationalities' (i.e. repertoires). 'Rhetoric', 'reality' and 'rationality' are constructed by discursive management practice in which problems and solutions are mutually constituted, managers are 'distanced' from the consequences of management initiatives, and HR managers and practices are identified with expertise and located within an organizational 'reality' that 'makes sense' (i.e. *constructs sense*) for managers and other organizational participants.

In respect of 'object' construction (environment, organization, individual) and 'repertoire' construction (Repertoires A and B), the discourse of HR/personnel managers corresponds with similar processes identified in the prescriptive literature: the 'internal logic' is the same.

CHAPTER SEVEN- DISCOURSE AND PUBLIC SECTOR HR/PERSONNEL MANAGERS

This chapter broadly follows the structure of the analysis of the private sector HR/personnel managers in that it focuses first on the construction of 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) through the telling of management 'tales' and then on the construction of 'repertoires' (A and B). However, as a preliminary, the construction of the key distinction between the public and private sectors is discussed. This distinction was not developed in the private sector interviews but forms a major component of the construction of all the key 'objects' in the public sector interviews. The dominance of this distinction throughout public sector 'object' and 'repertoire' construction lessens the variety found in management 'tales' in comparison with the private sector.

The Participants

Heritage Housing Association - Director of Personnel - Female

Vocation Service - Senior Personnel Manager - Male

Collective Study Division (CSD) - Assistant Head of Branch - Female

Belling Housing Department - Staff Development and Training Manager - Female

London Borough of Sunhill - Chief Personnel and Equality Officer - Male

London Borough of Wolford - Central Personnel Manager - Male

The private sector/public sector distinction

In this first section the construction of the public sector as distinct from the private sector is discussed. The idea that there are specific and significant features of working in the public sector is a strong theme that can be identified in most of the interviews. At Wolford Council the fact that they work for local elected members is seen as very significant, as demonstrated by this story about a committee meeting:

RA: ...at the end of the day we are working to local elected members who will have their own views and don't necessarily pay a great deal of time or attention to what professional people think is right. So I do very clearly recall a particular committee where it was perhaps one of the first times that we introduced the term 'Human Resource Management',

rather than personnel management which is what they were familiar with, and the reaction from at least one of our members was 'What is all this load of old rubbish? If they mean personnel management, say personnel management'. So it keeps our feet firmly on the ground, I think, working for a bunch of locally elected members and we might have a different view perhaps to some of the other organisations... (LB Wolford/a:5)

The distinctiveness of local authorities is also seen in terms of the public sector having an '*ethos*'. The difference from private sector organizations is taken further through reference to the four yearly cycle of elections in London Boroughs:

RA: ...Another thing you've got to bear in mind, of course, this is a local authority. So every four years, in effect, you get a new employer with a new set of attitudes and goals - including about their own workforce. So, in four years when you have the London Borough elections, you've got a council manifesto on which they were elected and that manifesto will say things about how they want to treat their workforce - and it will be different to the last four. So that is a different scenario...you've got quite rapid changes in attitudes, and values, and culture, and indeed every year, there may well be changes in the way that the council does business... (LB Wolford/a:8)

The four year political cycle is similarly emphasised at Sunhill Council:

VA: ...Because we are a democratically controlled organization, the policies of the council are quite significant. Councillors are elected for four years at a time. We had elections in London in May last year so we have a relatively new administration and we did have a change of control of the council. Now obviously if the politicians are trying to carry out, or deliver, a four year programme running up to the next election - they want as much space as they can get within that to concentrate on their priorities. I think part of the experience we have had over the last few years has been that if you had to spend two or three months of each year worrying about the budget, then it actually deflects attention from a lot of the real issues about improving service quality, focussing the services, and so on. (LB Sunhill:4).

The distinctiveness of local authority workforces in terms of the gender balance (i.e. more women employees than men) is also emphasised, and there is a claim that a lot of the staff at Sunhill, particularly those in the front line of service provision, have a '*fundamental belief*' in the public sector.

At Belling Housing Department the difference from the private sector is seen in terms of goals, conflicts, and legislation:

YA: ...for us anyway I think it's putting all that in the context of a public service that we are providing. So I suspect we are probably very different from say some of the private organisations say where your goal is very clear, the aims of your company are very clear, and then I assume the personnel function is probably quite straight forward. In that you are not constantly having to retrain staff in new legislation, new issues, and that's where I think we have to really stay on the ball in terms of national trends and all that. And, I

don't know, I've never worked in a private company, but I'm convinced it's probably a lot easier than the public sector. Simply because of all the conflicting issues that you need to continuously to deal with... (Belling:8)

The theme of changing direction due to administration changes - Labour, Conservative, and back to Labour - was also a feature of the Belling interview:

YA: ...And based on the administration there is a change in the policies. And a slight bias in how the different administration views different policies...for example when I first started at Belling one of the mega things was decentralisation. We engaged ourselves in the project of decentralisation of our housing programme. But when a new administration came in that was one of the first things they called off. So we had to change course... (Belling:8).

In contrast to this claim of a distinctiveness to the public sector the Vocation Service is seen as *'coming much more into line with what's happening elsewhere'*. While the public and private sector had been *'quite different'* in terms of ethos they are *'coming ever closer together'*. Whereas, at one time, in the public sector it took years to move staff out of the organization, now:

MA: ...If you don't fit the bill, if you are not able to deliver, you don't get the opportunity to stay... (Vocation Service:7).

This idea that it is more difficult to move staff out of the public sector was also identified at the Collective Study Division:

BA: ...one of our problems, and this may be where we are different from private companies, is that it is rather a long drawn out process to deal with people who are not up to the job and so you have to take on a bit of a battle if you take on somebody - especially if they've been around for some time... (CSD/a:8).

CSD is also differentiated from the private sector in terms of a possible difference between the *'kind of people'* employed and their motivation. It is suggested that measurement and performance pay may work for salesmen but may have the opposite effect in government departments where people are motivated not by financial rewards but by job satisfaction and working relationships.

The distinctiveness of public service is emphasised throughout the 'tales' which construct the public sector as different in terms of all three key objects.

The construction of objects in the public sector

As noted in the introduction to this chapter there were more similarities in public sector ‘tales’ and there was less variety than in the private sector. This is reflected in the reduced number of ‘tales’ in this chapter. Nonetheless, HR/personnel managers from the public sector talked in a narrative form very similar to that used by those in the private sector and it is still appropriate to use the term ‘tale’ to describe how they constructed the key objects (environment, organization, individual).

Tales of environment identified in the interviews with public sector HR/personnel managers include ‘tales’ of finance, legislation, and customers. The number of references to ‘customers’ in the public sector compared with the private sector was significant enough to justify their examination separately. The ‘tales’ of organization mainly focus on restructuring and the ‘tales’ of people emphasise the distinctiveness of public sector employees.

(i) *Tales of environment*

After the construction of the private/public split the next key difference between the two sectors is the way that the context within which the organization operates - and with which it interacts - is constructed. For Welford Council the most important challenge is the increasing financial restrictions which, it is thought, will continue regardless of what happens to either the economic recovery or the political complexion of the country. In this account the financial limitations on local authorities will continue to ‘*squeeze and squeeze and squeeze*’. This impacts on HR/personnel because human resources are seen the largest resource in financial terms for local authorities.

While at Sunhill there are a number of interrelated challenges the most significant issue is again finance and the organization is described as under a ‘*squeeze*’. The government is portrayed as ‘*constantly bearing down on what local authorities can spend*’ and are increasing controls (e.g. ‘*stringent*’ audit arrangements, etc.). This is being done at

a time when the demand for council services has increased and is likely to continue to increase. The major challenge is constructed in terms of how to continue to fulfil statutory obligations by providing good quality services to the people of the borough within an *'ever shrinking base budget situation'*. The difficulty is directly related to central government:

VA: *...the great difficulty of this is that we don't control one of the major components - which is the amount of money that the government choose to give us. And they can be quite capricious about that - and are...* (LB Sunhill:4)

Related to the challenge of finance is government legislation on compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). At Sunhill this is seen as a subsidiary problem involving the requirement that a number of white collar services or office based services will be forced to be competitively tendered over the coming 2 - 3 years.

At Collective Study Division (CSD) CCT was seen as the most important challenge. The effect of CCT is:

BA: *...it's opening up about 80% of our work...to competing against commercial organisations, where in the past...virtually all continuous survey work was done by this office...on a single tender arrangement.* (CSD/a:1).

At the same time the CSD is having responsibility for pay bargaining and pay grading delegated to it and the government is also encouraging the organization *'down the performance pay route'*.

At Belling Housing Department the CCT of housing management services has become *'the core of our whole division'* and involves a client/contractor split which will mean two divisions within one department.

At Heritage Housing Association the finance problem is in terms of funding which is *'drying up'* after a period during which Housing Associations had enjoyed cross-party political support. Funds had been diverted away from local authorities toward housing associations as local authorities stopped building homes and became *'enablers'* rather than providers. Current government policy is to switch some funding into home ownership and to reduce other funding. This has meant that Heritage has had to turn to private finance and

to reserves to make up the difference. In this context competition, in the form of other housing associations, is now becoming significant - primarily because they are competing for the same sorts of funding. Although CCT had not been introduced for housing associations at the time of this interview this manager suggested that it may be '*on the horizon*'.

At the Vocation Service the ever increasing financial pressures are again a key issue but are not seen as particular to the public sector - the private sector is also under pressure to trim back '*everything*' including resources and staffing levels. However, the Vocation Service has been given more autonomy over the use of the money available to it in terms of the deployment of staff.

In these 'tales' the environment is mainly constructed in terms of the influence central government has through financial restrictions and legislation which aims to introduce competition. In this sense, the environment as an object of discourse is constructed as beyond the control of the organization. As with the private sector constructions, HR/personnel managers identified constant change as significant and they 'distanced' themselves from responsibility for that change whilst constructing the role of HRM/personnel as reactive.

(ii) *Tales of customers*

In the private sector interviews with HR/personnel managers reference to customers was brief (although important). There was insufficient material across the organizations to warrant a separate 'tale'. However, in the interviews with public sector HR/personnel managers direct reference was made to customers as a key group.

The most developed 'tale' of customers came from the HR/personnel manager at Sunhill Council. The Council has identified three '*guiding principles*' that underpin the process of change and the development of services: '*customer first*', '*pride in the public sector*', and '*organizational efficiency*'. '*Customer first*' is the first priority. It aims to focus

on the people who will receive the service rather than on the way the service is provided.

This is linked to the second guiding principle, *'pride in the public service'* through customer satisfaction surveys and direct discussions with customers. This problematizes the customer:

VA: *...the point where the customer is that individual receiving the service is the point where we try and get very focused and say 'Within our broad policy and strategy, within the limits of the budgets we have got, how can we best meet the need of that individual?'. (LB Sunhill:10).*

At CSD the focus on customer needs is linked to TQM and attempts to *'reorientate'* the office. The emphasis is on what they have got to sell *'out there'* and the refocussing of how relations are handled. This has led to the employment of a marketing director.

At Heritage Housing Association the customer is linked to the fierce competitive market for funding which means that all Housing Associations are having to look at quality of service - including customer care strategies and tenant participation. This is in the context of a changed role for housing associations and a changed relationship with local authorities.

As it is pointed out at Belling Housing Department:

YA: *...over the last few years, the whole role of social housing has changed from one of local authorities being providers of social housing, to one where we are now enablers...so therefore we are in partnership with housing associations... (Belling:2)*

As *'enablers'* local authorities do not build houses anymore: that role has fallen on housing associations. However, housing associations are subject to a changing government policy:

SA: *...We were awash with funds because we were flavour of the month and there was a movement away from local authorities in terms of funding, so local authorities weren't building homes - increasingly the money was diverted to us...then in the current government's policy that's been reduced... (Heritage/a:2).*

Such policy refocuses the aims of the housing associations onto new customers. The current government is *'shifting the limited funds that are available'* to home ownership.

Government policy changes also directly affect the *role* of council housing departments, but a focus on customers remains at Belling through the strategic development of a customer care culture - even though they are now enablers rather than providers:

YA: ...*We are still working through what will be the best package, in terms of delivering good services to the customers* (Belling:4).

Belling's customers range from homeless people through to internal customers, but the main focus in terms of CCT is on the tenants.

These 'tales' of customers construct the environment as 'knowable' but, usually, as not yet 'known' in this respect. The way to 'know' customers as actors in the environment is through surveys and consultation initiatives. The environment is constructed through such 'tales' as beyond control.

(iii) *Tales of organization*

At Wolford devolution is seen in terms of a '*general drift*' towards a more efficient and effective use of resources which involves giving greater empowerment and discretion to local management through the delegation of decision-making. Wolford Council is a large decentralised organization with a number of different departments. Increasingly, personnel management is being undertaken in the departments rather than in the central personnel division. The aim is to revise policies and procedures so that line managers can exercise more control over personnel management. The rationale for such devolution is that local managers are most familiar with the day-to-day front-line problems and the most able to deal with them effectively.

At Wolford monitoring of delegated decisions is carried out, particularly of equal opportunities because it is accepted that financial pressures do have an impact on equal opportunities policies and procedures as they are often seen by line managers, '*erroneously*', as an impediment to cost cutting and efficiency. However, as a local authority, Wolford has to exercise its responsibilities in a lawful and appropriate manner

which limits the devolution process. There is some '*tension*' between the '*strategic centre*' and the service delivery departments caused by differing priorities.

Sunhill Council's third '*guiding principle*' - '*organizational efficiency*' - involves empowerment and delayering. The organization is reviewing the role and responsibilities of managers and is aiming to reduce the number of tiers of management to the absolute minimum that is consistent with good service quality by examining what value each tier of management adds to the process. Sunhill Council is trying to '*unravel*' bureaucratic controls to give the right managers the '*authority*' to make decisions and to control the budget they need in order to do the job.

Many of the personnel functions (admin, paperwork, run up to recruitment, local IR, discipline, grievance, handling consultations and employee communications, training) have been devolved to departments and the centre has a strategic policy-making role which must be customer responsive as finance is through service level agreements. Devolution of personnel functions and the minimalization of the centre are seen as ongoing processes which allows money to be focused on the front line services.

However, legislation means that there is pressure on large employers like local authorities to keep central control over certain areas, such as pay structures, to avoid problems with equal pay and the like.

VA: ...The law tends to drive...it tends to expect that a large employer like a London borough will have quite strong corporate control. Things like pay policy - clearly, if you start saying to different departments 'You set your own pay structures' you immediately get into equal pay problems. So the law tends to drive us towards saying 'We must have some central control of our broad policies in relation to personnel, human resources' and yet the pressure of devolvment and delegation actually to give managers more and more freedom. Keeping that balance, I think, is going to be the real test over the coming 2 or 3 years of actually saying 'How can we facilitate this move to empowering managers, to giving them control of the service they are expected to provide?' whilst at the same time ensuring that the council's overall philosophy as an employer, or overall statutory obligations as an employer, can be and will be met. That's quite a big gamble for us. (LB Sunhill:11).

At the Vocation Service major organizational change is seen as the most important challenge. This structural change is related to recent moves to give the Civil Service more

autonomy in terms of the use of the money and the deployment of staff. The intention is that the new structure will enhance the performance delivery of the performance measures that are spelt out in the mission document. The main initiative involves regrading within the existing structure in order to use the '*opportunity*' provided by autonomy. It is introducing more flexibility - '*on the surface at least*' - for staff to apply for vacancies outside of existing areas of responsibility and at higher grades. The intention is to focus on the demands of each job - '*what the job itself is looking for*' - through vacancy specifications, and then to select on the basis of the strengths and compatibilities of candidates.

However, the restructuring has led to '*major confusion in the organization as to where the hell it's all going*' and employees are unclear, uncertain and unsettled about the consequences for them personally. It is predicted that a large number of middle grade managers will not be able to remain in their present jobs and this personnel manager has '*great difficulty*' understanding what the benefits of this restructuring will be. He has particular concerns about those who will end up working in jobs that are not compatible with the level they are being paid for because that is not seen as an ideal way of motivating staff. The role of personnel/HR in the Vocation Service is constructed as increasingly concerned with redeployment, rather than the active career development of employees.

At Belling Housing Department policies for devolution are seen as a consequence of which political party is in power in the council: decentralisation had been a major initiative in the authority and a project was started with the aim of decentralizing the housing programme, but decentralization had been one of the first things a new administration had called off.

However, central government initiatives have had more impact on Belling, first, through the change in the role of local authority housing departments (from being providers to being enablers) and, second, through the introduction of CCT which necessitates a client/contractor split and a review of job descriptions to meet the needs of the new

legislation. This involves some fundamental issues, including deciding which functions come under which department. Despite the problems they are attempting to introduce good practice into the departmental structures.

HR/personnel managers describe and problematize public sector organizations in terms of structure. Tales of devolution construct organizations as bureaucratic and 'distanced' from service delivery. However, the organization is constructed as 'programmable' in that solutions can be found in structural initiatives.

(iv) *Tales of public sector people*

At Sunhill Council, '*pride in the public service*' is the '*guiding principle*' that represents an attempt to enable staff to feel that they are doing a worthwhile job to a good quality. It involves customer satisfaction surveys and direct discussions with customers. The distinction between the local authority and industry and commerce is explained in terms of the employees:

VA: ...a hell of a lot of the staff who work for the local authority do so because they have some fundamental belief in public service and the kind of service they are providing. I think that is particularly true of the front line staff - social workers, home helps, teachers in schools - have a high commitment to the job they do rather than to their employer. And there is almost a 'the customer mustn't suffer' attitude amongst a lot of the staff no matter what is going on here at the ranch. You know, 'Our first responsibility, our first role in life is to actually make sure we provide the best service we can'. Even though if you ask people, morale is quite low and so on, you would still find people giving of their own time to actually make sure that the job gets done, and that the customer is satisfied and so on. It's a bit of a peculiar situation. (LB Sunhill:9)

However, the squeeze on finances means that '*people have to learn to do things in new ways*'.

Gender is identified as an issue at Sunhill but it is seen as less of a problem for local authorities than for private sector organizations because councils employ high numbers of women:

VA: Local authorities, certainly in Sunhill and I think a lot of other local authorities, are quite fortunate in that the balance of the workforce is quite often that there are more women in the workforce than men. So in terms of the gender issues, provided we go about the consultation issues quite carefully, we can very often pick up on structuring jobs in ways that are more appropriate to both genders, both sexes, and different racial minorities

and so on, than perhaps we might otherwise. It has its problems I have to say, if you look at the most senior structure within the council - the chief officers - women are still significantly under represented at that level, racial minorities are significantly under represented at that level. I mean I'm not complacent about it - we do have issues to address there... (LB Sunhill:5)

Seventy percent of the workforce employed by Wolford Council lives in the community served by the council. The Central Personnel Manager believes that the workforce is aware and committed to the organisations goals - but only up to a point because the goals of local authorities can change quite significantly and quite rapidly with local political shifts. These political changes can lead to changes in attitudes, values, and culture as the council changes the way that it does business and changes how it wants to treat the workforce.

Decision making is devolved and issues such as equal opportunities are monitored. Job evaluation is regarded as an important part of equality based personnel procedures and is seen as a defence in terms of trying to ensure that equal pay legislation is complied with.

As noted in the discussion of the distinctiveness of public service in both CSD and the Vocation Service dealing with certain individuals is seen as a particular problem: a '*long drawn out process*' and '*a bit of a battle*' especially where they have been around for some time (CSD/a:8).

However, a changed government policy meant that CSD can now recruit some grades direct rather than having to go through the Civil Service Commission. This has meant that CSD has been able to recruit better quality staff than previously because the office is '*attractive*'. What the Head of Branch is looking for is people with good interpersonal skills who can adapt to a different working environment quickly, who show initiative, who are flexible and prepared to put themselves out for the job, who can make a contribution, and whose qualities '*match*' in the sense that '*they are people you can work with*' and who have a range of skills to ensure that there are balanced skills across the team. What she is not looking for is staff who simply want to come into a '*laid out*' job: '*people*

have got to be much more flexible...adaptable and prepared to kind of live with the fact that there isn't a lot of detail laid down to work within'.

Financial rewards are not seen as the '*top issue*' for quite a large number of people. Job satisfaction is a very important issue for quite a lot of people along with working relations with colleagues. She thinks that people at CSD are well motivated and driven without the pay and feels this may be connected to '*the kind of people who work in government departments versus the private sector*'. The consequences of performance pay is expected to be '*unhappy staff*' and '*more conflicts*'. Measurement and performance pay is expected to impact on peoples' willingness to move jobs and on their motivation. Although performance pay is seen as something that may increase performance of people such as salesmen it is seen as unhelpful at CSD and is '*more likely to be a negative in that people might give up fairly easily and say "Ah, well, you know, I'm at a box three level and that's it"*'. People may be motivated by the box-marking/performance system but:

BA: ... *I think really what motivates people here is not landing in the box four category where you are going to loose your job... (CSD/a:9)*¹³.

However, the people at the CSD are not rated as part of the Civil Service elite:

BA: ...*the box ones are your high fliers who probably are in some other bit of Whitehall...they'll be your mandarins of the future if you see what I mean. Most people in this department are basically twos or threes with a sprinkling of fours who are heading for either well either five or three... (CSD/a:7).*

Total Quality Management (TQM) is seen as a powerful tool for motivating and creating an atmosphere to get the most from people at the CSD. One key aim is to get the right '*set ups*' going so that TQM becomes a part of the normal way of working. Although that has yet not been achieved and people see these ideas as being quite separate from the whole way they work, CSD is trying to get TQM more '*mainstream*': that is, in the

¹³ Although pay negotiations have been progressively delegated to the individual government departments and agencies the box-marking system is common to many. Box-marking is a grading system used on employees' performance appraisal reports. Actual definitions may vary between departments but one Appraisal Guide provides the following definitions: box 1 = outstanding - objectives exceeded, box 2 = Performance good - objectives met, box 3 = Performance adequate - some objectives not met, box 4 = Performance inadequate - few or no objectives met.

structures of the organization and in the way in which people are managed. This initiative includes project boards, project team meetings, and performance agreements set each year.

CSD is also differentiated from the private sector in terms of the *'kind of people'* employed and their motivation. With regard to performance pay systems:

BA: *...It may work for a few people...and I can see it could work if you were a salesman...and you had a nice neat measurable thing...I can see it for those people that's probably quite motivating in a sense...but there are other people it may have the opposite effect on and I would think in this place certainly from what I have seen is that I think that people are well motivated without the pay - it's not the thing that drives people basically. (CSD/a:7).*

Bad or weak management and bad recruitment selection in the past is seen as a key issue in CSD because there are employees who have been selected for the wrong reasons - good interview technique but lacking the right qualities to do the job, for example.

While performance pay at CSD is seen as leading to unhappy staff, the employees of Vocation Service are presented as confused and unsettled by the restructuring. One of the major consequences of the restructuring is that managers will be working *'below grade'* which is not seen as an ideal motivator.

Motivation of staff is a key issue at Belling Housing Department and they are working on quality of services, good reward strategies, and pride in the service. These initiatives are seen as essential to workforce motivation which, along with skill, is regarded as central to becoming a good, efficient and effective organization able to win contracts under CCT. These motivation initiatives ultimately benefit *'the customer outside'*.

At Heritage Housing Association they want well paid, motivated and quality staff but at the same time they need to be competitive:

SA: *...there's an issue about keeping in with being competitive in the market in pay terms but trying to have a flexible pay structure as well and recruiting and retaining high quality staff... (Heritage HA/a:4).*

The scarcity of some skills means that at Heritage they sometimes *'short circuit'* their rigorous equal opportunities policies to recruit certain available individuals. This in itself leads to complaints from employees. There is also a motivation issue concerning

temporary staff. Unlike suggestions in the literature that the ‘periphery’ might be harder to motivate than the core workforce, at Heritage Housing Association the temporary staff are paid better than their colleagues - which creates ‘ripples’ for permanent staff.

There is more variety in the ‘tales’ of public sector people than in other public sector ‘tales’ but there are two distinct constructions. The first constructs people as belonging to a public sector ‘ethos’ and having a different set of motivations to those in the private sector. The second version appears to have more in common with the private sector in problematizing motivation.

The construction of repertoires - public sector HR/personnel managers

In the first part of this chapter the construction of the key objects of discourse (environment, organization, individual) was examined in terms of ‘tales’ which indicate the way in which the key objects are ‘known’ by those with expertise in the management of people in work organizations. The variety of ‘tales’ told by these public sector HR/personnel managers was not so marked as in the private sector. In the following section it will be argued that HR/personnel managers ‘make sense’ of organizational ‘reality’ by constructing specific ‘rationalities’ and that such constructional activities have common effects which can be detected as an alignment and ordering of the key objects in ‘repertoires’. This section examines the extent to which the interviews with HR/personnel managers can be understood in terms of the two repertoires first identified in the examination of prescriptive literature (Repertoire A = environment → organization → individual, Repertoire B = environment → individual → organization).

As with the private sector the interviews with these public sector HR/personnel managers do not always correspond to the repertoire A/repertoire B distinction identified in the analysis of the prescriptive literature. However, it is argued that these interviews display a ‘duality’ in which repertoire A appears dominant and a second repertoire is additionally used for explanation and problematization.

The discourse of these managers constructs ways of 'knowing' the environment as 'calculable' although uncontrollable, and the organization and individual as calculable and programmable.

Sunhill Council

The major challenge facing Sunhill Council is seen as how to continue to fulfil the statutory obligations - providing good quality services to the people of the borough - within an ever shrinking base budget. Sunhill has '*core values*' and '*three guiding principles*' which underpin the whole change process and the development of services. The guiding principles are '*customer first*', '*pride in the public service*', and '*organizational efficiency*'.

There are a number of interrelated environmental factors, the most significant being finance and CCT. Sunhill do not have any control over the amount of money supplied by central government which is the major component of the budget: '*the organization...tends to react constantly to its' budget position perhaps more than anything else*'. The government is portrayed as '*capricious*' and is '*bearing down on what local authorities can spend*' at a time when the demand for services has increased. The situation had led to job losses and redundancies which have had an impact on industrial relations and staff morale. The strategy adopted by Sunhill was an 'all-in-one-go' policy intended to create a period of some stability and to give the organization some '*recovery time*'. Such an approach is linked to the four yearly cycle of elections for London Boroughs and is an attempt to deal with the problem of spending time each year dealing with the implications of finance rather than on service delivery. The 'all-in-one-go' policy leads to some '*painful*' problems including compulsory redundancies and very significant change driven through in a very short period of time.

The problematization of the customer provides both a '*guiding principle*' and a focus for the change in peoples jobs:

VA: ...*In a lot of cases what we're talking about is resolving the needs of an individual at the end of the day. And trying to make our service as flexible as possible to meet the needs*

of that individual. So it's moving away from, you know, 'This is the service we provide whether you like it or not' more towards, 'What is the service that best meets your needs and can we provide it?'. So certainly on things like home care where years ago...there was a very specific regime of what the home help would do - which was quite limited...I mean they might do some cleaning and they might do the beds and they might do some shopping for you. We actually now go through an assessment of needs with the person who is receiving the service, and the home care service as it is now called has been restructured much more flexibly. So, yes, we can and still do those things if that is the most critical need that the person has, but if actually what they need is some help having a bath or somebody to talk to for half an hour because they haven't seen anybody all week, then if that is what their primary need is, that is what we will provide... (Sunhill:10).

So the 'customer first' policy 'is actually making sure we have got people working to the standards and qualities that we want to deliver our services'. This does cause some problems with the idea of who the customer is. An anecdote about planning permission provides an example of the contradictory needs of different customers:

VA: ...There was an amusing conversation with the chief planning officer the other day, talking about performance management and how he was dealing with his customers. He was saying, 'It's very difficult because if I give planning permission for a building to be put up I've probably one satisfied customer but everybody who objected to that is a very dissatisfied customer. So it's actually quite difficult to see how I can produce customer satisfaction with the service that I do'... (Sunhill:10).

The 'customer first' principle requires a change in the workforce through a management development programme. This involves examining where the organization has got to be in two or three years time and assessing what that is going to mean for the managers and what sort of skills and knowledge they are going to need. The programme identifies competencies and measures people against them. This is then used as a 'platform' to create individual learning contracts to enable them to develop to meet the expected demands of the organization. The management development programme, together with a structural review, will lead to a reduction in the number of managers and a refocussing of resources to the actual service delivery. However, reorganization and redundancies lead to problems with the staff who remain. This provides part of the rationale for extensive support for those directly affected by redeployment and redundancy. Sunhill tries to give comfort to people:

VA: ...if you find yourself in that unfortunate position, the council will do what it can to ease the problem... (Sunhill:9).

Despite the ambiguity in the '*customer first*' principle, the necessity of organizational and individual change to meet the requirements of environmental factors provides an example of repertoire A. The government and '*customers*' are created as an environment in which Sunhill must operate and to which it must respond in terms of organization and workforce. The organization is constructed as determined by financial restrictions and legislative change - and by what it is to be a public sector organization. The four-yearly cycle of local elections and the possibility that another party may take control has a significant impact on the organization which has responded with an '*all-in-one-go*' policy.

Repertoire A in the interview at Sunhill is an attempt to construct a '*specific rationality*' which establishes relations between the key objects. For example, in developing competency-based management they are aiming to produce specific '*Sunhill competencies*':

VA: ...*The consultants that we are using at the moment are very much at the level of working with us and with the managers to try and refine and hone those, and actually produce a set of competencies that we can say is good enough for Sunhill, although they will be Sunhill competencies not something that the consultant has produced and sold to us, not something that has been produced by a college or a business school or anything else, it will be the things that Sunhill and Sunhill's managers recognise as relevant to their needs* (Sunhill:7).

The second repertoire argues that the particular kind of people that work for the authority require particular approaches to organization. The difference between a local authority and industry and commerce is emphasised in terms of the staff, a lot of whom work for the local authority '*because they have some fundamental belief in public service and the kind of service they are providing*'. This means that, although morale is quite low, people still give their own time to make sure that the job gets done and the customer is satisfied. The Chief Personnel and Equality Officer at Sunhill comments that '*it's a bit of a peculiar situation*'. Where repertoire A underpins the '*customer first*' and '*organizational*

efficiency' principles, it is repertoire B that underpins the *'pride in the public service'*

principle and *'counterbalances'* the structural determination of employees:

VA: ...*So we are trying to counterbalance the tendency that a normal male, predominantly white senior management structure will produce a set of competencies that will reinforce that, by using people who can actually put other sides into it...I'm trying very hard to make sure there is good consultation with the workforce, so that the competencies are real to people, they are not just something that we have written on a piece of paper, but people can actually identify within those competencies work that they do, things that they can see developing that they would need to know about or be able to deal with...* (Sunhill:6).

The competency approach is linked to the need to *'undo and unravel'* the bureaucratic controls to give staff the *'authority'* for decision-making and budget control.

The *'customer first'* and *'pride in the public service'* principles problematize the organization and individual in such a way that the two repertoires are combined. For example, although the strategy adopted was due to organizational requirements, one of the benefits of the *'one hit'* approach is that:

VA: ...*the staff get it out of their system and you can begin to pick morale up again - when you keep going back year after year after year then everybody is constantly looking over their shoulder wondering when it's their turn - which doesn't make for a happy and committed workforce...* (Sunhill:9)

The third guiding principle - *'organizational efficiency'* - represents the *'eternal optimism'* that objects can be operated on in a programmatic manner. It involves layering and empowering through the management development programme and the structural review which provide the *'solutions'* to the particular problems facing Sunhill.

Repertoire A in the interview with Sunhill draws together an environment (including central government and customers), an organization and people in an alignment and ordering in which problems (four-yearly local elections, legislation and financial restrictions) and solutions (an *'all-in-one-go'* policy, development programmes, devolution) are mutually constituted in a *'reality'* in which outcomes and responses can be *'known'* as rational. The attempt to introduce stability in the form of *'recovery time'* through the *'all-in-one-go'* policy is only partly successful because the predictions on which it was based were only partly accurate: this is explained and *'distanced'* by reference to the *'capricious'* control

over the largest part of the budget. Repertoire B involves the construction of the Sunhill workforce in terms of particular attributes (e.g. a fundamental belief in public service) and the redesign of the organization to take advantage of those attributes (e.g. empowerment, consultation, job-sharing). Both repertoires mutually construct 'distanced' problems and specific solutions and specify the role of HR/personnel.

Heritage Housing Association

For the Director of Personnel at the Heritage Housing Association the most important challenge is seen in terms of shifting political policies. Until recently housing associations were *'flavour of the month'* with all political parties and funds had been switched to them from local authorities as the role of local authorities changed from being providers (building homes) to enablers in partnership with housing associations. However, funding from central government for housing associations is drying up and there is a need to seek money from the private sector or dig into reserves in order to continue with development. Heritage is having to vie with other housing associations for funds in a fiercely competitive market. There has also been a shift in focus onto the existing housing stock with an emphasis on customer care and tenant satisfaction/ participation and a shift in government policy and funding to home ownership and temporary housing initiatives. These government-inspired 'shifts' in funding and focus construct the environment as requiring an organizational response (which has a direct impact on individuals) and 'distances' the organization from responsibility for changes. For example, the yearly funding regime means that there is a very uncertain environment in the development department which now has a very small core workforce and is staffed with temps. Similarly, the focus on customer care has led to an emphasis on training, both in-house and by external providers.

The second repertoire problematizes the development of employees which is also solved by training: there is a *'huge'* management development programme involving an

action learning programme in which the emphasis is on empowerment and delegation through project teams (*'great for winning hearts and minds and ownership'*).

The two repertoires are combined in the problematization of *'affordability'*:

SA: *...on the one hand we want well paid, motivated and quality staff but on the other hand the tenants pay our salaries and if we're to be competitive and have affordable rents...affordability is a big issue and so those two things have to be married...* (Heritage/a:4).

The solution is provided in terms of a revision of the job evaluation scheme in conjunction with management consultants. Linked to this is a flexible pay structure:

SA: *...because its not actually that easy to change your pay structure its a whole sort of torturous process and having changed it, its not that flexible to change again...* (Heritage/a:4).

Within this context the role of HR/personnel is constructed in terms of becoming a facilitator (with the danger that there will be little left to do) while the line managers take ownership of what was traditionally personnel. However, Heritage is described as a *'schizophrenic'* organization in that it is *'terribly interested'* in HR/personnel issues and using the facilitator approach, but some people still want to *'police and monitor'* the organization with a more traditional personnel approach.

The issue for the future is seen as concerned with education and continuous learning:

SA: *...not learning a set thing which will become redundant in 2 years time but it's about learning to learn. So that when it does change you're geared up to change with it. So it's the process rather than the content and organisations need to be like that too.* (Heritage/a:6).

In this interview, then, two repertoires can be identified. In repertoire A the environment (central government) is aligned with the organization (the changing role to providers with central government funding and then to providers without funding, diversification, a focus on tenants, etc.) and employees (through training, casualization, recruitment, pay, etc.). Repertoire B provides a rationale for organizational change through empowerment, delegation, project working, and development to make the most of

individuals as constructed in terms of attributes. In this construction of organizational reality the two repertoires are combined through the problematization of '*affordability*' - the balance between wanting well paid, motivated and quality staff and being competitive with affordable rents - as a '*big issue*'. The two repertoires are combined in this interview to constitute the problems for which HR/personnel has the solutions.

The Vocation Service

At the Vocation Service the effect of the environment - specifically the fall in unemployment - is seen as having a major impact on the structure of the organization over the next few years. The organization is undergoing major structural change leaving many middle managers doing work below the level of their grade. In this account the ever increasing financial pressures lead to everything - including staffing levels - being cut back. Increasingly the role of personnel section is to look after the redeployment of staff rather than the active career development of staff. This, it is claimed, is the '*reality*'. However, the redeployment has been made possible by the Vocation Service having been given more autonomy over the use of the money available to it for staffing arrangements. The aim is to improve performance but the effects of the new initiatives are seen in terms of confusion among staff leading to them feeling uncertain and unsettled.

A second repertoire can be identified in this interview in that the new initiatives and structure give staff the opportunity to apply for higher grade work that might previously have been denied to them. The intention is that the focus will be more on '*selecting people on the basis of their strength and the compatibility of their own individual strengths to what is being looked for in the vacancy specification*'. However, there are doubts expressed in this second repertoire. The account given is prefaced by '*ostensibly it is supposed to...*', and the prediction is that '*a large number of middle grade managers will not have jobs in the next 9 months. Although I say will not have jobs will not be able to remain in their present jobs*'. Having staff working in jobs not compatible with their grade

is seen as '*not an ideal motivator*'. Nonetheless, the restructuring is constructed as a programmatic (if flawed) attempt to change the organization to fit the '*strengths*' of the individuals. At the same time, the restructuring is a response to changing government legislation and environmental change (e.g. falling unemployment). The flaws in the policy construct a role for HRM/personnel in terms of redeployment rather than development. What is distinctive about the construction of objects and repertoires in this interview is that, while the organization is 'distanced' from the causes of the restructuring, this manager also distances himself from this particular restructuring policy. However, in doing so, he allocates blame to the organization rather than HRM/personnel. HRM/personnel is constructed in a prescriptive manner as development and, in terms of a 'reality', as redeployment.

CSD

The government has an direct impact on the CSD through the CCT legislation which leads to pressure to reconsider all resources (including staffing arrangements, overheads, etc.) to see if they could be used more efficiently. This problematization of government policy 'distances' the management of the CSD from responsibility for the cause of the necessary changes. The policy implications include cutting posts and changes in terms and conditions. The Assistant Head of Branch thinks that the people who have jobs are being expected to do more in the same amount of time and for the same amount of money.

In this interview, the environment (government policy) is constructed as having a direct impact on the organization (in terms of pressure on costs) and, therefore, on the workforce (in terms of reduced numbers of jobs, intensification of work, revised pay and conditions). While some government policies are seen as useful (particularly the changes to way the organization can recruit and dispose of staff), the second repertoire in this interview constructs the government policy which is introducing performance pay as inappropriate to the work of the CSD. It is inappropriate because financial rewards are not seen as the '*top*'

issue’ for quite a large number of people: this manager thinks it is ‘*sad*’ that the government is going down the ‘*performance pay route*’ which she thinks is a ‘*distortion*’. Job satisfaction is a very important issue for employees along with working relations with colleagues. She thinks that people at CSD are well motivated and driven without the pay and feels this may be connected to the ‘*kind of people*’ who work in the public sector rather than the private sector. The consequences of performance pay is expected to be ‘*unhappy staff*’ and more conflicts. The problem for this manager is that she disagrees with the idea that it is possible to set out and agree what is going to be done for the year in a way that would be measurable. The famous ‘widgets’ tale is used to explain measurement. However, this argument is developed by suggesting that measurement has to be weighed against costs and that higher up the management chain a larger proportion of the job is not measurable or is only measurable by the way the whole team works. This problematizes managers who may not have control of a whole team and there may be an impact on motivation and on the willingness of people to move to different jobs. There are additional problems with getting box marking by manager systematic. Performance pay is seen as something that may increase performance of some people, but not those at CSD: it is more likely to be ‘*a negative*’.

Despite this disagreement with government policy, there is still an ‘eternal optimism’ that things can be done better. Bad or weak management and bad recruitment selection in the past is seen as a key issue in CSD because there are employees who have been selected for the wrong reasons.

Similarly optimistic is the ‘tale’ of Total Quality Management which is believed to have more to offer than performance pay and other management techniques in that it has the potential to be a much more ‘*powerful tool*’ for motivating and creating an atmosphere to get the most from people. Total Quality Management is also a consequence of CCT at CSD as other government departments and private sector competitors had quality accreditation

which, although seen as unsuitable for CSD, prompted an investigation of quality approaches. TQM had not yet become mainstream in the structures of the organization and has not yet had a big impact, but the aim is to *'build it in into peoples' thinking and their whole way of working'*.

In this account, then, repertoire B functions as a critique of the 'rational' consequences of repertoire A. Although the policy implications of repertoire B are not identified, the specific rationality of repertoire B is an argument that the particular circumstances and kind of work at the CSD provides motivation and job satisfaction for the particular kinds of people who work in the public sector.

Wolford Council

In the interview with the Central Personnel Manager at Wolford Council the continuing central government financial restrictions impact on the organization and on individuals because human resources are the largest resource of a local authority in financial terms. The major organizational response is devolution to departments. Devolution is seen as a more efficient and effective use of resources which involves giving greater empowerment and discretion to local management through the delegation of decision-making. Personnel management is increasingly being undertaken in the departments rather than in the central personnel division so that line managers can exercise more control:

RA: ...the financial restrictions ultimately bite on the people who have responsibility for delivery of front-line services. And the thinking, therefore, is that they are the ones that are in the best position to know and understand the problems that they face in trying to deliver services within the new financial restrictions. So in personnel policy terms that they are in the best position to make the day-to-day decisions and judgements on personnel matters - within overriding, overarching policies obviously (LB Wolford/a:2).

Devolution is seen as part of the 'ethos' of the organization (and of most local authorities) and as an *'accepted trend'* which has been going on for some years and *'isn't particularly questioned'*:

RA: ...It is assumed that this is a very decentralised organization and therefore the things that the organization wishes to do it would normally choose to do in a decentralised way. So while there might be specific matters on which there should be a debate as to whether

that is best done centrally or departmentally, the general assumption is that things are best done at the lowest most decentralised level (LB Welford/a:3).

Delegated decisions are monitored, particularly in equal opportunities terms, to make sure they are made in a *'reasonably equitable way'* because financial pressures do impact on policies and procedures. Against devolution is set the legal responsibilities of Welford as a large employer which leads to tension between the strategic centre and the service delivery department. This tension is also reflected in different priorities.

However, in addition to this account which corresponds to repertoire A, there is a second account. This second account does not correspond to repertoire B, but works from what it is to be a local authority. The relationship between what happens at a local political level and what happens at the level of the organization and to individuals is made clear in this passage:

RA: *...I don't know whether you saw on the news last night what has just happened at Hackney?*

Interviewer: *I heard on the news this morning.*

RA: *It's been a complete turnover of the leadership. Now the reason I bring that into this discussion is to inform you that that will be flowing through into a set of different ways of dealing with the workforce, on whatever are their current issues of the day, industrial relations or other human resource terms. What happened last night will change the way that they treat their workforce. Now when you say, 'Is the workforce sort of aware and committed to the organisations goals?' well, what I'm saying is, yes up to a point, but the goals can change quite significantly and quite rapidly (LB Welford/a:8).*

Thus, the organization changes and the policies and practices are affected by a change of local political leadership. However, while Welford Council has had *'some success in keeping the workforce in tune with the councils' attitudes and values'*, the effect on individuals is only *'up to a point'*.

This second account is elaborated in two other ways in which the role of Welford Council as a local authority has an impact on it as an organization and employer, and an impact on the individuals who work there. First:

RA: *...Particularly with a local authority, we at the centre have got a particular concern to ensure that the council exercises its' responsibilities in a lawful and appropriate*

manner...So there is an ownership of the councils' role and responsibility as a large employer... (LB Wolford/a:5).

The second aspect seems to be that because Wolford Council is a local authority it has a particular kind of workforce:

RA: ...And that's the other thing to bear in mind in terms of this community that we serve. It's a very large employer. And something like 70% of its workforce lives in the community which this council serves. (LB Wolford/a:5).

So the context of financial restrictions is carried through the organization by devolution to those on the front line of service delivery. There is a political neutrality in the construction of this repertoire: financial restrictions will continue *'regardless of what happens to either the economic recovery or the political complexion of the country'*. Despite the rapid changes that can be caused by new political administrations at Wolford the policy of devolution is set to continue because of the *'ethos'* of local authorities. However, progress toward increased commitment and motivation in the workforce is qualified by the four yearly cycle of local elections and the possible change in the administration.

In the second repertoire, work in a local authority is seen as distinctive because of certain features which construct a particular way of *'knowing'* what it is to work in local government. It includes knowing that the political leadership of a council can change overnight and can then introduce a set of different ways of dealing with the workforce. This can lead to rapid changes in attitudes, values, culture, and the way that the council does business. Both repertoires *'distance'* management because they locate the causes of problems and changes (e.g. central government, the 4-year cycle) as beyond the control of management. However, what is distinctive about this account is that the solution - devolution - is similarly *'distanced'*: it is seen as part of the *'ethos'* of local authorities.

Belling Housing Department

The key issue at Belling Housing Department is the introduction of central government legislation - the CCT of housing management services. This requires a client/contractor split which necessitates the restructuring of the department into two

divisions in order gear themselves up to *'meet the competition'*. This restructuring has a direct impact on the employees:

YA: *...Basically the main emphasis is that everybody will have to re-apply from the second and third tier because the structure has changed and, therefore, everybody's jobs have changed. So the likelihood is that we will all be required to re-apply and I don't know the various positions that have been created. There will be new job descriptions and the full works... (Belling:3).*

Belling have been able to follow a strategic approach to some issues although 'strategy' is seen as dependent on regular reviews:

YA: *...there have been times when we have decided on a strategy and we've seen it through. Particularly around some of our customer care initiatives...we've decided that we need to develop a customer care culture, and we started out with a strategy that we needed to train - we needed commitment from senior management and then we needed it to cascade down and we have actually been able to adopt that approach quite clearly. Simply because we had the framework for it and it started off with a presentation to the senior management team, got their commitment and then, you know, we've seen it all the way down to the front-line staff in the organization. (Belling:7).*

This passage demonstrates a 'rational' approach which characterizes the whole interview. In repertoire A the government sets the organizational agenda - in terms of a client/contractor split - the delivery of good services to the tenants is identified as the key priority, the Councillors order a review of the structuring of the department, the personnel/HR manager works on new job descriptions and a training needs analysis, sets interview dates and gets people in posts along with good reward and motivation strategies. For individuals, all jobs will have changed and all will have to be required to re-apply.

As at Wolford, a second repertoire is based on the impact of local political changes:

YA: *...we've had administration changes over the last, you know, in the last year we had a Labour administration and they took over from a Tory administration, who had taken over from a Labour administration... (Belling:8).*

These administration changes led to changes in policies such as housing programme decentralisation - *'that was one of the first things they called off. So we had to change course'*.

In this repertoire she is convinced that it is easier and more straight forward to work in personnel in a private organization where *'your goal is very clear, the aims of your*

company are very clear' unlike the public sector where you are constantly having to retrain staff in new legislation and new issues, really stay on the ball in terms of national trends, and continuously deal with all the conflicting issues. In this context, Belling Housing Department is working towards 'best practice':

YA: ...we are actually putting in place a lot of good management practices. Particularly over the last year or so, we have actually engaged on some things that are solid which will stay stable and constant regardless of which administration we have or what our goal as a department is. But they are just seen as good management practices, good personnel practices and we are hoping to, over the next year or so, make sure that they become part and parcel of the department structure (Belling:8).

In this interview, then, the problem is change in policy - at either local or national level - and this change appears at an organizational level in terms of structure. However, 'good management practices' can be established in spite of change. Strategies, as 'frameworks', can be enacted if regular reviews permit re-prioritization.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter it has been argued that interviews with public sector HR/personnel managers can be understood in terms of the construction of 'repertoires' in which key 'objects' are constructed, ordered and aligned as the interviewees 'make sense' of 'reality' by constructing a 'specific rationality'.

The first section argued that the construction of a distinction between the two sectors was an important feature of public sector discourse. The second section focused on the construction of the key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) and described the interviews in terms of management 'tales'. It was argued that there was considerably less variety in these public sector 'tales' than in those identified in interviews with the private sector managers. The third section focused the extent to which interviews with public sector HR/personnel managers could be understood as 'rationally' connected in management discourse by causal relations being asserted between the key 'objects'. It has been argued that the ordering and alignment of the key 'objects' in two 'repertoires' is similar to the constructive process identified in the private sector. In this 'duality' of

'repertoires' problems and solutions are mutually constituted. As in the private sector, the problems and the solutions are 'integrated' into an organizational 'reality' and 'rationality' within which they 'make sense'.

It was argued that, in the process of construction, managers 'distanced' themselves from the consequences of management initiatives while claiming control over HR/personnel practices (although the HR/personnel manager at the Vocation Service distanced himself from the particular restructuring policy). These constructional activities position HR/personnel managers and practices within organizations and it was argued that such positioning can be understood in terms of the two 'repertoires'. As in the private sector, these HR/personnel managers also positioned themselves in response to questions about the difference between HRM and personnel.

At one public sector organization the difference was articulated with a reference to the prescriptive literature:

'Well the literature says it's strategic - strategic contribution whereas personnel is policy, mainly writing procedures and policies and implementation...the whole thing is about HR professionalism and becoming facilitators, and the line managers taking ownership of what was traditional personnel.' (Director of Personnel, Heritage).

This was seen as having serious implications for the future role of HRM/personnel.

Similarly, at Belling Housing Department the difference was constructed in a fairly familiar fashion:

'Well, I think human resource goes a lot wider than just personnel...traditionally personnel was very much to do with recruiting and keeping files on individuals, looking at keeping all their records intact, things like absences, time offs, annual leave. I think human resources is so much more broader. It encompasses the whole element of working within an organization that is to do with the individual. So we are talking about from the time you actually recruit someone to the way you induct them, the way you train them up, the way you develop them, their whole careers, and also other human resource things like staff appraisal, feedback on a continuous basis. All those things I see as a human resource function. Whereas personnel, I think, was very much geared towards recruitment and selection and it stopped there' (Staff Development and Training Manager, Belling).

By way of contrast, the manager at Welford understood the distinction in a manner that the councillor he had quoted in an earlier example would have approved of. Keeping his feet *'firmly on the ground'* he said that:

'I could give you what I understand to be the professional view, in terms of it being more strategic and blah, blah, blah, but it's not something that's of any significance to me to be honest.' (Central Personnel Manager, Welford).

As in the private sector, there was a considerable variety in the construction of this distinction but there was a common concern with the position and role of HR/personnel managers and policies within organizations.

The main finding of this chapter is that HR/personnel managers in the public sector do discursively construct organizationally specific and varied 'realities' that 'make sense' as causal relationships are established between the key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) which are aligned and ordered in 'specific rationalities' (i.e. 'repertoires').

'Rhetoric', 'reality' and 'rationality' are constructed by discursive public sector management practice in which problems and solutions are mutually constituted, managers are 'distanced' from the consequences of management initiatives, and HR managers and practices are identified with expertise and located within an organizational 'reality' that 'makes sense' (i.e. *constructs* sense) for managers and other organizational participants.

The main difference between the public and private sectors lies in the distinction between the two sectors: it was argued that the distinction is itself constituted by the discourse of public sector managers. The dominance of this distinction throughout public sector 'object' and 'repertoire' construction lessens the variety found in management 'tales' in comparison with the private sector.

The discourse of public sector HR/personnel managers corresponds with similar processes identified in the prescriptive literature and the private sector in respect of 'object' (environment, organization, individual) and 'repertoire' (A and B) construction: the 'internal logic' is the same.

CHAPTER EIGHT - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The first chapter of this thesis reviewed prescriptive and 'critical' HRM texts. It was argued that 'strategy' and 'HRM' are interrelated in that 'strategy' is presented in key prescriptive texts as essential to the effective management of human resources and effective HRM is presented as an essential part of organizational strategy. The literature review covered usage of both concepts in prescriptive and analytical texts and identified the key problem with the established 'critical' approach: that is, strategic HRM appears to be an important and significant development in the management of people in work organizations *but* the 'critical' approach argues that HRM does not exist in 'reality' (at least in Britain), and that it cannot exist (because it is contradictory).

The second chapter examined an alternative approach to understanding HRM inspired by the work of Michel Foucault and based on the concept of 'discourse'. It examined the concept of 'discourse', described Foucauldian-inspired studies which focus on power, knowledge, surveillance and the constitution of subjectivity, and discussed the implications of discourse analysis for an understanding of 'strategy', 'HRM' and 'rationality'. A model was developed through which the prescriptive management literature is understood in terms of the construction of 'specific rationalities' which link apparently separate management initiatives in discourse. Three key 'objects' of discourse were identified (environment, organization and individual) and it was argued that these are linked in 'specific rationalities', referred to as 'repertoires', which order and align the 'objects' in causal relationships.

Chapter Three re-examined and analysed the prescriptive management literature. It argued that the construction of 'specific rationalities' can be demonstrated through the analysis of the literature as a 'discourse'. The analysis emphasised the significance of the construction of the key 'objects' and the way that these are 'rationally' aligned in two

different orderings which were termed 'repertoires' (Repertoire A = environment → organization → individual and Repertoire B = environment → individual → organization). These two repertoires were described separately and together as they appear in discourse.

Chapter Four re-examined the 'critical' HRM literature. It argued that the 'critical' literature has defined HRM as an academic subject and, in that process, had defined a set of academic problems. The chapter argued that the conclusion of the 'critical' approach - that HRM is incoherent 'rhetoric' that does not correspond with 'reality' - is a product of particular positivist definitional practices which themselves create the 'gap' between 'rhetoric' and 'reality' and limit the possibility of finding 'strategic' HRM. This conclusion sustains the conceptualization of management initiatives as individual, discrete, disparate and *ad hoc*.

In Part II the approach developed in Part I was utilized in an analysis of interviews with managers that aimed, first, to establish whether the transcripts of interviews with managers can be understood as replicating the processes of 'object' and 'répertoire' construction that had been identified in the prescriptive literature; and, second, to identify the effect of such processes of discursive construction.. It was argued that these interviews could be understood as examples of managerial discourse in which the key objects are constructed, through the telling of management 'tales', and then ordered and aligned in 'repertoires' that represent the construction of 'specific rationalities'. As a result of conceptualizing HRM as a discourse, HRM can be understood at the level of individual enterprises *and* at a more general level across enterprises.

Chapters Five and Six described and analysed interviews with private sector HR/personnel managers. Chapter Five focused on the construction of the key 'objects' (environment, organization and individual). It argued that the key 'objects' are constructed by managers through the telling of a variety of 'tales' in which they utilize linguistic devices

akin to storytelling in answering questions. These ‘tales’ provide explanation and justification for management initiatives, not by reference to ‘best practice’, but by the *telling* of experiences - of their own, of other social actors in the environment, of organizations - through linguistic devices that contextualize and illustrate their answers. ‘Tales’ provide a report of events and contain a point - a moral - which is revealed to justify or legitimate some practice or decision. The revealing of the moral gives the account a tale-like quality. ‘Tales’ also provide anecdotal ‘evidence’: they include what may be seen as myths, legends, fables, yarns, illustrative stories, reported or imaginary quotations, questions or speeches, apocryphal stories, and perhaps fictions. Furthermore, the tale-tellers constitute themselves as objective, expert, and ‘distanced’. The considerable variety in the ‘tales’ in which managers constructed the key objects was emphasised.

In Chapter Six, the focus turned to the alignment and ordering of the objects in the two ‘repertoires’. The ‘repertoires’ are understood as examples of the construction of ‘specific rationalities’. It was argued that, despite the variation in ‘tales’, the analysis of repertoire construction demonstrated similarities between interviews with HR/personnel managers from different organizations. Furthermore, it was argued that, in the process of ‘repertoire’ construction, problems and solutions are mutually constituted and managers ‘distance’ themselves from responsibility for the outcomes of management initiatives.

Chapter Seven described and analysed interviews with public sector HR/personnel managers. It was argued that the distinction between the public and private sectors was itself created in discourse and had a significant impact on ‘object’ and ‘repertoire’ construction. The interviews with public sector HR/personnel managers are (not surprisingly) dominated by references to central government that provide the context within which public sector organizations must operate. Generally, this context takes the form of financial restrictions, the associated creation of markets where no market previously existed (through initiatives such as compulsory competitive tendering), and political changes (either

in administration or in policy initiatives). However, the descriptions of 'repertoire' construction demonstrated similarities between interviews with HR/personnel managers from the two sectors in terms of a 'duality' of 'repertoires', in terms of the mutual constitution of problems and solutions, and in terms of practices which 'distance' and position HR/personnel managers and policies. The discourse of HR/personnel managers can be understood as a means of locating the role of HR/personnel managers and policies within organizational 'reality'.

Appendix II analyses interviews with non-HR/personnel managers from the public and the private sectors. It is argued that, while there is evidence of 'object' and 'repertoire' construction, this mainly corresponds to repertoire A. This suggests that the particular duality of 'repertoires' (A and B) is a feature of HRM discourse but not of management discourse in general. The distinction between the discourse constructed and used by HR/personnel managers and the discourse constructed and used by other managers lies in the connections and relationships that are established between the key 'objects'.

Conclusions

This thesis has examined the concept of strategic HRM from a perspective informed by a Foucauldian conceptualization of 'discourse'. In contrast to the 'critical' literature that identifies HRM as 'rhetoric' that is not matched by 'reality', this thesis argued that 'reality' is discursively constructed. From this perspective it has been argued that the 'critical' literature has defined its own version of HRM in a way that constructs the 'gap' between 'rhetoric' and 'reality' as HRM is simultaneously created as an academic subject. The approach of the 'critical' literature has led to the conclusion that management initiatives are disparate, individual, discrete, and *ad hoc*. This, in turn, has led to a focus on management initiatives as unconnected rather than as 'strategic' or connected.

The response of this thesis to the 'critical' literature has been an argument that HRM can be understood as a novel 'discourse' that constructs the connections between the

apparently disparate, individual, discrete, and *ad hoc* management initiatives through the discursive construction of two key 'rationalities' ('repertoires'). The connections are not pre-existing in the sense that positivist social science implies that they should be: it is practices of discursive construction that *make* and *remake* the connections. This claim is supported by the demonstration of the way that the prescriptive literature can be analysed in terms of the construction of 'repertoires' that order and align the key 'objects' in different ways by establishing causal relationships between them..

Furthermore, it has been shown that, while there is considerable variety in discursively constructed organizational 'realities', HR/personnel managers construct the same two 'repertoires' in ways that mirror the prescriptive literature. The processes and practices of repertoire construction are 'rational' from the point of view of those utilizing the discourse because the managers are constructing the 'rationality' by aligning and ordering the key 'objects'.

The perspective developed in this thesis is important because it provides an explanation of two phenomena identified by the 'critical' literature: the variety between organizations and the lack of evidence of strategic HRM. Both features can be explained by the variety in management 'tales' that construct the key 'objects'. Management 'tales' display variety in the construction of 'realities' that are specific to each organization and display a variety of approaches to (apparently) *ad hoc* management initiatives in different organizations. The different specific 'realities' and the *ad hocery* suggest an enterprise-by-enterprise approach to empirical research. The 'critical' literature compares the 'strategic' focus of the prescriptive literature to the variety and *ad hocery* of 'reality' and concludes that HRM is mere 'rhetoric'.

However, understanding 'HRM' in terms of 'discourse' reveals discursive practices (i.e. 'repertoire' construction) that link the apparently *ad hoc* initiatives. This thesis demonstrates that such discursive practices are a common feature in discourse as articulated

by HR/personnel managers in different organizations. Each HR/personnel manager does articulate a set of individual and varied 'tales' that confirm that each organization faces an individual 'reality'. Such variety and individuality is identified by the 'critical' literature as a 'reality' lacking 'strategy' or commonality across organizations. However, those individual and varied 'tales' construct the key 'objects' and two 'repertoires' in a fundamentally similar manner. Therefore, HRM can be understood from a discourse perspective in terms of a connected and interrelated group of policies and practices rather than as an unconnected grouping of initiatives linked only by an 'umbrella' term.

The problem with 'traditional' positivist approaches is that the form of 'knowledge' required to 'make sense' of the 'reality' that is constructed in HRM discourse is itself constructed within discourse (as HRM expertise). This particular form of HRM 'knowledge' is not subject to the rationality requirements of an 'alien' epistemology such as that utilized by the 'critical' literature. However, the 'critical' literature is also a discourse that constructs a specific rational 'reality'. It is this 'critical reality', not 'HRM reality', that is compared to prescriptive management texts. The 'critical reality' shows that prescriptive management texts are 'rhetoric': 'HRM reality' cannot be compared to prescriptive management texts in the same way because 'HRM reality' is constructed within those prescriptive management texts.

This is not to argue that prescriptive management texts are not rhetorical. However, the identification of rhetorical or ideological practices should not restrict research to an enterprise-by-enterprise approach that views management initiatives as unconnected. The analysis of 'rhetorical' and 'ideological' practices can be accommodated within a discourse perspective, informed by contemporary cultural theories, that views 'HRM' and 'strategy' as cultural constructs. From the discourse perspective developed in this thesis the analysis of 'HRM' and 'strategy' is not restricted to the examination of management initiatives as individual, discrete, disparate and *ad hoc*, nor to analysis only at the level of the individual

firm. This is because the focus has been on how discourse is constructed and utilized to establish relationships between 'objects' and people. Similarities were then identified in the construction of 'repertoires within a variety of organizational 'realities' (i.e. the different specific 'realities' constructed by managers in different organizations).

Within this analysis the 'repertoires' in HRM discourse have an important 'rhetorical' (i.e. *persuasive*) function in that they construct a 'rational' account for other managers, for superiors, and for those subject to the discourse. In this process HR/personnel is positioned in discourse as a function, department, 'strategy', etc.. However, as examples of discourse, the repertoires are more than mere 'rhetoric'. They provide new possibilities for rendering 'work' and 'individuals' calculable, computable, measurable, etc., by 'knowing' objects and the relationships between them in particular ways.

The key conclusion of this thesis, then, is that HR/personnel managers from different organizations construct, in fundamentally similar ways, two specific rationalities (i.e. 'repertoires') that define 'reality' within organizations. 'Rationalities' and 'realities' are discursively constructed in organizations in such a way that people and practices are located in discourse in relation to the key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual). People and practices are located as *subject to* the knowledge constructed by HRM discourse. In 'Repertoire A' (environment → organization → individual), HRM knowledge asserts that the changing environment necessitates organizational change that, in turn, necessitates particular individual attributes. In 'Repertoire B' (environment → individual → organization), HRM knowledge asserts that the changing environment produces individuals with a human 'nature' that necessitates particular organizational policies and practices.

While the alignment and orderings of objects in terms of repertoire A and repertoire B was not as distinct in the interviews with managers as in the prescriptive literature, it was argued that the discourse of HR/personnel managers displays a distinctive 'duality' of

repertoires. The availability of two 'repertoires' forms a 'web of relays' and means that HR/personnel practices can be explained as 'rational' by those using the discourse to those subject to the discourse. The two 'repertoires' can mutually constitute problems and solutions as one 'repertoire' provides the problem and the other the solution. Alternatively, the 'rationality' of one 'repertoire' can be problematized by the 'rationality' of the other. Both 'repertoires' are calculative and identify the problems for which HRM solutions are always available.

HRM/personnel policies and practices are 'integrated' into the reality of these 'repertoires'; that is, HRM/personnel policies and practices are 'known' as (that is, are constructed as) 'rational' techniques for operating on contingent organizations and individuals. These techniques provide the mechanisms for 'strategically' guiding the organization to organizational objectives.

'Duality' has featured frequently in a wide range of literature concerned with management and organizations. For example, Perrow (1961) identified 'official' and 'operative' goals, Gouldner (1954) identified 'representative' and 'punishment-centred' patterns of bureaucracy, Stinchcombe (1959) distinguishes between the 'craft' and 'bureaucratic' administration of production, Burns and Stalker (1961) identify 'mechanistic' and 'organic' systems of management, Braverman (1974) contrasts two contradictory views in the literature of occupations, Friedman (1977) identifies 'responsible autonomy' and 'direct control' as alternative management strategies, Hollway (1991) notes the 'fitting the man to the job/fitting the job to the man' slogan from the 1950s, Watson (1994b) identifies competing 'official' and 'unofficial' discourses, and so on. Dualism can also be identified in debates about issues such as strategy formulation/implementation and the rhetoric/reality of HRM. In contrast to such approaches which use 'duality' to account for variation and unevenness in 'reality', the 'duality' of repertoires indicates considerable similarity between HR/personnel managers in different organizations.

Whilst 'traditional' and interpretative approaches suggest research should be done on an enterprise-by-enterprise basis, the 'duality' in the articulation of 'specific rationalities' identified in the interviews with HR/personnel managers suggests that generalizations can be made about HRM discourse.

A key point is whether such 'duality' is a feature of discursive knowledge production in general, or whether this particular duality can be located in relation to features of the production of HRM 'knowledge'. One approach that suggests that 'duality' might be inherent in discourse argues that, while discourse produces, it is itself a product. In Giddens' (1979) terminology there is a 'duality of structure' in discourse:

"Rule governed activity" is not merely the employment of fixed, given rules whereby new sentences are generated: *it is at the same time the medium whereby those rules are reproduced and hence in principle modified* (1979:18).

However, duality has been identified as a characteristic of other specific discourses, particularly scientific discourses (e.g. Kuhn 1962, Gilbert and Mulkay 1984) and the greater challenge (and one more interesting to those concerned with the analysis of HRM) is to locate the 'duality' as causally related to the specific circumstances from which HRM has emerged.

One approach would be to link repertoires to the tensions caused by the contradictions of capitalism. Such an approach could follow from Legge (1989) or Keenoy (1990a, 1990b). From a Foucauldian perspective Townley similarly identifies 'the "gap", or space, between what is promised and what is delivered' by the employment contract (1994:13). However, while such explanations may suggest a duality, such duality would be expected to be contradictory while the two repertoires in the interviews with HR/personnel managers are complementary. To some extent, the emphasis on contradiction is characteristic of 'critical' approaches that seek opposition or tension in their subjects. That some Foucauldian approaches follow this path supports Thompson's assertion that

‘Foucauldian terminology adds nothing’ (1993:198). Another approach is supplied by Thompson who identifies a duality in which:

‘the decentralization of the labour process and production decisions (through mechanisms as diverse as profit centres, subcontracting and quality circles) is combined with increased centralization of power and control over the spatially dispersed, but interdependent systems’ (1993:190).

As with Kinnie’s (1985) analysis, these processes of centralization and decentralization appear complementary.

However, a Foucauldian approach that emphasises dual processes, and which is specifically concerned with people, is suggested by Hacking who argues that ‘making up people’ can be described in terms of two ‘vectors’:

‘One is the vector of labelling from above, from a community of experts who create a “reality” that some people make their own. Different from this is the vector of the autonomous behaviour of the person so labelled, which presses from below, creating a reality every expert must face’ (1986:234).

This could also be true of ‘making up organizations’. Hacking argues, with regard to people, that there is not a general story to be told about making them up as each category has its own history. Similarly with organizations, but while the accounts supplied by managers provide a history which makes up each organization, there are similarities in different organizations which indicate that generalizations can be made across the ‘limited territory’ of HRM/personnel discourse which go beyond the ‘purely “local” narratives that remain locked in self-limited space and time’ (critiqued by Thompson 1993:197). The ‘duality’ in the interviews reflects the two ‘vectors’ of making up people and the two vectors of making up organizations: experts create a ‘reality’ in which organization is determined by their construction of environment (labelling from above/Repertoire A) and face another ‘reality’ pressing from below (organization determined by individuals/Repertoire B).

A major effect of the particular way in which the key ‘objects’ are aligned and ordered in ‘repertoires’ is the ‘distancing’ of managerial responsibility. In the Introduction

to Part II it was noted that Keenoy and Anthony (1992) argue that 'distance' is achieved in two ways. First, managerial responsibility is 'divorced' from managerial action and is located in the 'natural hurricane' of the free market. Second, managerial responsibility is 'distanced' from outcomes by HRM practices such as the incorporation of responsibility for outcomes into the 'performance' of the individual employee (1992:245). Both 'divorce' and 'distancing' were found in the interviews with HR/personnel managers. The environment was constructed by most managers as uncontrollable (although 'knowable') and the organizational responses were varied but included: the driving down of responsibility to the lowest possible level to 'drive more efficiency' from people (Biscuits), devolution (both the London Boroughs), the monitoring of individual performance through new technology (Safety), and competencies (Sunhill ¹).

However, further examples of the 'distancing' of managerial responsibility were identified in the interviews. Current management is 'distanced' from prior management initiatives through reference to the past. This is done through the telling of particular 'tales' of the past in which initiatives identified as failures are characterized as errors and poor management decisions. Through their location in the past the causes of such 'failure' can be safely attributed to environmental factors, organization and/or individuals but not to 'programmes'. As Gordon (1980) argues, 'every programme caters in advance for the eventuality of its own failure'. Following Gordon's argument, 'failure' in work organizations does not precipitate the breakdown of programmes but acts instead as an impulse for 'the perpetual effort to reform' programmes - as process strategy, strategic HRM, etc. - an impulse which 'continually reinvokes the model of their original, aborted programmes' (Gordon 1980:250). Similarly, Knights and Morgan (1990) argue that failures are 'relegated' to tactical errors and organizational weaknesses rather than attributed to a failing of strategy. These practices sustain the 'eternal optimism' that current programmes

¹ See Iles and Salaman (1995:227) for a discussion of 'competencies' as an example of 'distancing'.

can and will work better, be more efficient, lead to demonstrable (i.e. measurable) improvements, and so on. Of course, such practices do not prevent management claiming credit for success: these practices provide the means by which management can be 'distanced' from failure but close to success.

The construction of the environment in the discourse of managers is important because it is *definitional* in that it leads to the identification of the uncontrollable and the controllable. However, the uncontrollable environment determines the response of the organization in that in discourse it *necessitates* a particular organizational response informed by the expertise of HRM/personnel. The 'rationality' of repertoire A means that the organization is constructed as having to follow those practices out of the necessity of environmental determination and, hence, management responsibility is 'distanced' by that necessity. The construction of the environment in discourse leads to an effective denial of management choice. Such a denial forms the basis of 'tales' of common interests between the managers and the managed (or between the organization and the unions). The 'rationality' of repertoire B means that the organization is constructed as having to follow certain practices because human beings have a 'nature' that must be catered for by the organization. Therefore, the construction of the individual in the environment limits managerial choice (at least, for 'excellent' organizations) as 'human nature' determines the organization. Managers are, once again, 'distanced' from responsibility for the outcomes of management initiatives.

The construction of 'objects' and 'rationality' constitutes a role for an expert knowledge which has techniques to define and operate on the controllable organization and workforce. Management initiatives can be distanced from failure - by attributing failure to external factors, including 'change', environment, the past, etc. - while remaining close to success by asserting a causal relationship between management initiatives and the achievement of 'performance' that can be incorporated into the 'contractual' responsibilities

of the individual. At the same time the consequences of management initiatives for the workforce - in terms of new jobs/job descriptions, eroded demarcations, changed terms and conditions, etc. - can be attributed to the *necessary* response of management to external factors and to the inevitability of change.

The effect of 'change' in the construction of discourse is to 'question' the *status quo*: the subsequent articulation of 'reasons' constructs the 'specific rationality'. 'Change' in HRM discourse provides the rationale and the justification for changing management practices by asserting a causal relationship between a particular account of contextual change and the changing organization and changing individuals. This causal relationship has the effect of distancing managerial responsibility from the consequences of management initiatives through reference to the inevitability of 'change'.

One further feature of the interviews was the extensive use of consultants. Although the trend towards increasingly using consultants was not specifically explored in the research, such practices can be seen as another possible method of 'distancing' through the contracting out of difficult decisions. An example of this form of 'distancing' is in the interview with Brokers where the decision was made to use consultants that already had established links with the organization *'to tell them things they already knew'*. This was in a context where one of the major causes of change was the reactions of Stock Market analysts. The appointment of well-known consultants can be seen as an attempt to restore market confidence and, at the same time, to 'distance' management from responsibility for the subsequent workforce reductions.

The 'distancing' of management from responsibility for the outcomes of management initiatives 'positions' HR/personnel managers and practices within the constructed organizational 'reality'. Positioning is also a consequence of the construction of 'expertise' which itself has effects beyond rhetoric. In the process of the alignment and ordering of objects in which problems and solutions are mutually constituted,

HRM/personnel managers are repositioned as experts, with expert knowledge and expert practices, who can mediate the relationships between the three key objects (environment, organization, individual) in a 'rationalized' organizational 'reality'. Expertise functions to establish the HR/personnel manager as a professional. As Legge argues:

'professionalism may be considered as existing in situations where the producer [i.e. professional] is able to define the needs of the consumer [i.e. client] and the manner in which those needs are to be met' (1978:76).

The discursive construction of the environment is so important because the increasingly cited external factors are characterized in terms of 'change' while the very type of 'change' which necessitates new forms of specific rationalities to be developed also works against a new *fixed* alignment and ordering of objects. The alignment in repertoires, therefore, is 'loose and approximate, and always mobile and indeterminate' (Miller and Rose 1990:10). Nonetheless, the 'repertoires' are constructed as determining managers, practices, organizations and/or individuals.

From a 'traditional' perspective, problems are seen as 'natural' consequences of unchallengable trends. This implies that the main contributions that HRM/personnel can make are concerned with the identification of those problems and the 'rational' working out of appropriate solutions. However, from the perspective of discourse analysis, the problems and solutions identified by HRM/personnel are mutually constituted. Such a discursive construction of problems as 'natural' defines the solutions as 'necessary' and the consequences of solutions (in terms of HR/personnel policies and practices) as beyond the responsibility of management.

The particular HRM/personnel expertise (scientific, rational, objective, etc.) that provides this way of 'knowing' objects as 'rationally' aligned and ordered also 'knows' 'objects' as measurable (i.e. open to investigation by scientific, rational, objective methods) and as subject to expertise. The discourse requires the invention of new things to measure (performance, quality, objectives, inputs, outputs, etc.) and new techniques of measurement

(appraisal, evaluation, monitoring, etc.). Hence, while there may be ‘rhetorical’ effects (i.e. persuasion), HRM discourse is more than mere rhetoric.

Strategy

‘Strategy’ has a limited utility as a tool for analysing the management of people in work organizations. It is limited by problems associated with its definition and is more usefully conceptualized as a *topic* of research: that is, not as an explanatory tool but as something that requires explanation. However, the debates about the ‘strategy’ concept do appear to be useful for managers. HR/personnel managers used many of the concepts developed in the ‘strategy’ literature. While the term ‘strategy’ did not explicitly appear with any great frequency, managers described processes in their organizations which correspond to the ‘classical’ theories of strategy, to incrementalism and emergence, to process theories, to theories of competitive advantage, to planning and portfolios, to theories concerning importance of leadership, and to the excellence literature. No single conceptualization from the ‘strategy’ or ‘excellence’ literature would adequately capture the processes described in a single interview. HR/personnel managers use ‘strategy’ concepts freely as they construct, order and align the key ‘objects’.

Where the term ‘strategy’ does feature in the interviews with HR/personnel managers it is mainly associated with organizational direction and planning. This conceptualization of ‘strategy’ corresponds to the traditional ‘rational’ approach or the ‘classical’ perspective (Whittington 1993, Legge 1995) in the literature. For example, ‘strategy’ is used in a description of the organization as a goal-directed entity at Biscuits. This version of strategy is then linked to organization and performance as the key HR/personnel elements required to achieve the organizational objectives. Similarly, ‘strategy’ at Brokers was used to refer to the direction of the organization as a whole - ‘*strategic direction*’ - and to identify the key decisions and decision-makers. At Easyway, ‘strategy’ is associated with planning and direction.

The term 'strategy' had more significance in the public sector. At Sunhill, 'strategy' was used to indicate policies that guided overall approaches for a fixed period, such as the 'all-in-one-go' strategy that involved major job loss at the start of a four year term of office rather than causing further disruption by spreading redundancies out. At the level of individual policies in different public sector organizations 'strategy' appears as a form of planning or a framework for management by objectives: for example, the customer care strategy at Heritage, and training and reward strategies at Belling. Strategy was also used by the London Boroughs to distinguish between centralized policy-making and functions devolved to service delivery departments (Sunhill and Welford).

In the interviews 'strategic' discourse added to the process of 'distancing' management from responsibility for outcomes. 'Strategy' is constructed as the unquestioned good from which other practices unquestioningly flow. Strategy is 'distanced' by being unquestionable, axiomatic, and demarcated from debate. Such 'distancing' presents HRM as the consequence of a 'reality' in which the context (the environment/central government financial policy) determines what the organization *must* do to get to where it wants to be. 'Strategy' is, then, constructed as an area of importance that can be 'known' by the expertise of HRM/personnel and *should* be informed by that expertise. 'Strategy' is not necessarily rational, but is used in the construction of 'rationality' and programmatic approaches to HRM.

HRM

HRM as an idea has a significance particular to Britain and, as has been noted, Easthope argues that:

"ideas" take on meaning according to the discursive context or historical tradition within which they are taken up. The same ideas developed in different national cultures (and we are stuck with those for some time to come) are not, in fact, the same ideas' (1988:xiii).

HRM in its most recent formulation was imported and translated from the United States into Britain 'seemingly fully formed' (Keenoy 1990b:363). HRM came to the

attention of British academics, as an 'objectively existing "it"' (Watson 1995a:11). "It" entered the discursive context and historical conditions in which a number of other political, social, and economic discourses were becoming dominant. In addition, there were a number of particular developments in the professional 'expertise' characterized as personnel management. From the world of military discourse, 'strategy' appeared in management discourse and was embedded in both the 'rational' and the 'process' variants. These concepts did not develop from a slow progression of thought about the management of people in work organizations, but are powerful - and rhetorical/ persuasive - discursive constructs that brought with them a number of attendant theoretical problems. The introduction of such constructs presented new discursive resources that the existing discourses accommodated. HRM discourse is a product of prior discourses (including personnel, IR, human relations, etc.) and of literature (prescriptive, critical, general management, organizational psychology, etc.). This discourse as a product and as expertise provides a ready-made set of repertoires and ready-made solutions (i.e. best practice). As a *product*, then, HRM expertise can be used to impose a 'rationality' in which problems are constructed and identified in such a way that they can be solved by the ready-made solutions of the expertise. As *discourse* the expertise is constructed, reproduced, and modified. As Easthope argues:

'Each additional text both repeats the discourse and differs from it, each is a term which conforms to the discourse but (however slightly) transforms it' (1983:9).

The issue of the nature of the relationship between the literature and managers is important. It concerns whether the literature 'makes the managers' or the managers make the literature (i.e. the literature 'reflects' the discourse of managers). As a contribution to the prescriptive literature HRM is important for, as Willmott argues:

'prescriptions selectively (re)construct and rationalize particular kinds of management practice' (1993:518).

Although this research cannot make claims about the extent to which HR/personnel managers are influenced by the prescriptive literature (or *vice versa*), several managers indicated an awareness of issues discussed in the literature and there is some correspondence in that the construction of similar ‘objects’ and ‘repertoires’ can be identified in the literature and in the interviews. If there is a causal relationship, this research was unable to determine the direction of causation. The prescriptive literature and the interviews provide individual examples of discourse but, taken together, can be understood as HRM discourse which is repeated and transformed as it is reconstructed and reproduced.

The range and variety of the responses to questions about the distinction between HRM and personnel do not indicate a ‘sterile debate’ (Gennard and Kelly 1995) because, in the interviews with managers, the distinction was mainly used to position HR/personnel managers and practices at a higher level in the organization or at an earlier stage in the decision-making process; that is, debates about the distinction are used in the positioning of HR/personnel managers in relation to the command of resources so that they can ‘produce reality’ for other social actors (see Mangham 1986:55). The emphasis on concepts such as ‘strategy’ and ‘integration’ in HRM discourse raises the status (Kamoche 1994) and the profile of HRM expertise through association with ‘core’, high-level functions and ‘competitive advantage’ rather than the secondary, welfare and IR functions associated with previous versions of ‘personnel’. As noted, the prescriptive literature identifies the position of HR/personnel within the organization as a key issue in making HRM/personnel a strategic consideration. ‘Strategy’ in management discourse has positive associations with rationality, scientific objectivity, military efficiency, and long-range planning (but not the negative associations of ‘planning’). The links with scientific objectivity and rationality are produced and sustained in HRM discourse through reference to psychology and pseudo-scientific applications. HRM discourse identifies and locates HR/personnel managers as

objective, scientific, rational, professional, specialized experts. Academic debates and courses about HRM and personnel contribute towards this process by providing a legitimacy for HR managers and policies, and a justification of such knowledge as 'expert' knowledge.

The interviews with HR/personnel managers demonstrate, not a rewriting, but a 're-telling' of organizational reality - a 're-telling' of the familiar in a construction that elevates the status of HR/personnel and centralizes it as a core concern rather than a service function. None of the HR/personnel managers denied they were strategic. However, for all the attention in the literature, this analysis seems to suggest that HRM is 'the dog that didn't bark' (Watson 1995a): there are 'trends' in the organizations which the literature may identify as HRM but which these managers do not identify as such (see also Storey 1992).

As Keenoy and Anthony argue:

'the ideological project of HRM is still in the process of fabrication. No one proposes that the system of values it espouses is already shared by organizations, their employees or even their managers; no one claims to have discovered it residing in the organizational undergrowth' (1992:249).

The interviews with managers examined in this study did not indicate a strong preference for speaking of HRM instead of Personnel but, while the 'system of values' may not be universally shared, the 'internal logic' of HRM has been shown to be common among managers.

In this thesis it has been emphasised that HRM can be constructed in a variety of different ways - as map, model, theory, function, department, etc. (Keenoy 1990a, Noon 1992, Legge 1995). It has been argued that, in discourse (which includes the prescriptive literature and these interviews), the most important feature of HRM is not its definition but its function and effects in discursive practice. HRM appeared - fully formed but 'brilliant' in its ambiguity (Keenoy 1990a) - and entered into a context in which the ambiguity allowed it to be linked to a variety of other discourses - such as personnel, the new industrial relations (Storey 1989:4), the new right (Legge 1989), new wave management (Wood 1989), Total

Quality Management (Ishikawa 1985, Oakland 1989, Hill 1991), flexibility, (Atkinson 1984a, 1984b, 1985, Pollert 1988a, 1988b, 1991), excellence (Peters and Waterman 1982, Peters and Austin 1985), enterprise and neo-liberalism (Rose 1992, du Gay 1996a), 'rational' and 'process' versions of strategic management (Knights and Morgan 1991), and the recent emphasis on the provision of 'service' rather than product. The significance of HRM as a discourse is that, in the process of ordering and aligning the key 'objects' in 'specific rationalities', it *provides* a link between expertise in the management of people in work organizations (as personnel, as IR, as excellence, or even as HRM/HRD) and those other discourses. HRM does not just 'reflect' the discourses of the 'new' approaches: as a discourse it *produces* links between those new discourses and expertise in the management of people in work organizations. HRM as a linking discourse provides 'knowledge' which can define, delineate, divide, select and group objects of 'reality' from several other discourses in relation to each other in a 'rational' order and alignment.

Differentiation, delineation, and sub-division are important processes in the construction of discourse and are essential to the positioning of HR/personnel managers as experts with a perspective that includes 'strategic integration' for, as Watson argues of organizations:

'The *differentiation* of an organization into various compartments has always to be accompanied by efforts at *integration*, to ensure that the efficiencies gained by the compartmentalising are not lost and strategic effectiveness threatened' (1994b:153).

So too with HRM discourse. The processes of differentiation make 'integration' a key component, and 'integration' necessitates a 'strategic' approach.

The 'integration' of policies in HRM discourse (as articulated in the prescriptive literature) becomes a possibility because HRM discourse provides a 'rationality' in which such expertise can be linked to success. Within such 'rationality', the 'integration' of HRM policies - 'internally' (i.e. HRM policies with each other) and 'externally' (with business strategy) - becomes the only 'rational' course to follow. Understanding the integration of

HRM/personnel with broader business strategies and the organizational context has been identified as the key issue for Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) graduates (Marchington 1996). Unlike the 'critical' literature which seeks to examine HRM from a 'critical' perspective that utilizes its own (external) standards of 'rationality', understanding HRM as discourse and as a product of discourse focuses attention on the way that 'rationality' itself is discursively constructed while HRM as a product is used to construct 'rationality' in organizations and in literature. Within such a constructed rationality seemingly diverse, disparate, individual and *ad hoc* practices can be understood as linked.

Rhetoric, reality and HRM discourse

In this thesis it has been argued that the conclusion of the 'critical' literature - that HRM is largely contradictory 'rhetoric' that is not matched by 'reality' - has important implications for research into the management of people in work organizations in that it implies that research should be focused on management practices as unconnected, individual, disparate, discrete and *ad hoc* rather than 'integrated' or 'strategic'.

The thesis argues, however, that such a conclusion is bound up with particular practices in the 'critical' literature that define 'strategic HRM'. The significance of this is that the product of the definitional practices is a *particular* definition of HRM that is then examined in terms of coherence and which is held up and compared with 'reality'. It has been argued that it is this definition of 'strategic HRM' by the 'critical' literature that simultaneously constructs the 'gap' between 'rhetoric' and 'reality' as HRM is created as an academic subject. The 'critical' literature, therefore, does not provide a 'neutral' definition of HRM but constructs a *particular* version of HRM as an analytical subject that is then compared with a *particular* version of 'reality' constructed by a 'self- and subculturally referenced' theoretical practice. The thesis made use of the Foucauldian concept of 'discourse' to develop a perspective that identifies the problems of the 'critical' literature as products of that particular positivist academic approach.

The Foucauldian perspective provides a means of understanding and analysing the construction of 'objects' and 'specific rationalities' in prescriptive management literature and texts generated through interviews with managers. This approach identifies connections between managerial initiatives that the 'critical' literature conceptualize as separate, individual, disparate, discrete, and *ad hoc*.

The analysis of transcripts of interviews with HR/personnel managers from several different organizations demonstrated that managers replicate the processes of discursive 'object' and 'repertoire' construction that can be identified in the prescriptive literature. Furthermore, this approach identifies the effects of such discursive construction by managers. These include the 'distancing' of managers from the outcomes of management initiatives, the positioning of HR managers and practices within organizations, and the mutual constitution of problems and solutions. Such an approach accommodates the variety of organizational 'realities' and identifies similarities between discursive constructions articulated by managers in different organizations.

The 'critical' literature, in claiming that there is a 'gap' between 'rhetoric' and 'reality', implies that HRM is a false representation of 'reality'. In contrast, the approach developed in this thesis understands HRM as a discourse in which 'reality' is constructed. Instead of a research focus on management initiatives as individual, discrete, disparate and *ad hoc*, brought together under an 'umbrella term', the focus from a discourse analysis perspective is on the way that relationships between the environment, the organization and the individual are constructed, on the connections established between management initiatives, and on the subsequent links between HRM discourse and other 'new' managerial discourses.

APPENDIX I

Notes on interviewing and transcribing

Introduction

Personnel managers, HR managers, or managers with an identifiable personnel/HR responsibility were contacted by letter. Managers from fourteen organizations provided usable interviews. In addition, eight line managers from these organizations were interviewed.

Of the fourteen organizations, eight were companies operating in the private sector and six were public sector organizations. The private sector organizations operate in different product markets and provide various products or services. Their sizes range from those employing 150 staff to those employing several thousands. Of the six public sector organizations, two were central government, three were local authorities, and one was from the voluntary sector.

The semi-structured interviews

A 'traditional' approach to gaining qualitative data from organizations would involve recording meetings, conversations, discussions, and interviews. Boden (1994) provides an example of this kind of approach, but her focus is on the (non-Foucauldian) discourse of interactions within organizations. However, for this research the focus is solely on how managers construct rationality and reality in discourse. Therefore, only taped, semi-structured interviews with managers are used. These interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes. The tapes were transcribed and these transcripts provided the raw data for analysis.

Other documentation associated with the sampled organizations (such as documents already in the public domain, annual reports, advertisements, etc.) was rejected as research data because such documents may have been produced by copywriters or speech writers rather than managers.

To gain confidence of participants, interviewees were promised a draft of the transcript from which they were free to delete anything, for whatever reason (Boden gave similar assurances). The interviewees were told that the analysis would be restricted to the transcripts only. As with Boden's research, deletions were rare.

After a few warm-up questions (What is your job, what is your job-title?, What does the organization you work for mainly make or do at the place where you work?), the interviews focused on two main questions:-

(i) What is the major challenge facing your organization today?

(ii) How is your organization addressing that challenge?

Subsequent questions were of a general nature or for clarification. For example:

What does that policy involve?

What is the role of personnel/HR in that policy?

What is the difference between personnel and HR?

The main questions structured the interview in as much as some points of reference were required for comparison between organizations. However, the focus was on variety rather than continuity and the subsequent questions, wherever possible, were drawn from the interviewees' own replies.

Typing up

The transcription notation system usually utilized by discourse analysts was developed by Gail Jefferson (see Potter and Wetherell 1987, Boden 1994). This system provides the means of transcribing gaps, overlaps, the absence of gaps, extensions of vowel sounds, etc. However, this kind of detailed transcription was considered unnecessary because although the interview questions were transcribed, the answers were mainly long enough to discount the effects of 'turn-taking' and the like. Therefore, the tapes were transcribed in a fairly simple manner.

Gaps in speech are indicated by two or more full stops, but there is no indication of length of gap. All 'errs' and 'erms' are included. Round Brackets () indicate that material is either inaudible or there is doubt about the accuracy. Square brackets indicate that something has been deliberately omitted, either by the interviewee or the interviewer, for a variety of reasons. As noted above, deletions by interviewees were rare. All names have been deleted. Material in square brackets is either clarificatory information or an identifier, e.g.: [competitor 1]. The examples quoted in the analysis have been edited for the sake of clarity and space. Managers are identified by two letters. The first letter is random - HR/personnel managers have been given a second letter ('a') and line managers a second letter ('b' or 'c').

The managers did not have prior warning of what questions would be asked. Their answers had no doubt been 'rehearsed' in some sense, but they were largely 'off the cuff'. Errors or mistakes (such as contradictions, etc.) are not criticised in this analysis as errors or mistakes but are taken as indications of the way that managers understand the management of people at work in the context of a particular 'knowledge' of the world and management.

Some repetition in the analysis is unavoidable. As has been noted, 'objects' are multi-dimensional, and may be constructed in several 'tales': individual tales may also construct several objects. For example, the statement:

you can only run a flat organization if you've got the calibre of people in who have got the potential to handle more than one or two roles... (Bio-Tech Screens:11)

contributes towards the construction of both 'organization' and 'individual' as objects.

Identifying the separate constructional processes in analysis often involves different 'readings' of the same sections of text. Repetitions have been avoided where possible but because the analysis is of the detail of discourse it is necessary to quote some passages at length

As Potter and Wetherell argue, 'Transcription is a constructional and conventional activity' (1987:165). Interviewees did not always talk in sentences. This was indicated by the typist who soon stopped putting in capital letters. Full stops at the end of sentences and capital letters at the beginnings were put in during a checking stage in an attempt, not so much to give meaning or to interpret the texts, but rather to make the texts readable. The checking stage was carried out with the tape recordings.

Coding

The crucial difference between usual academic reading and reading for discourse analysis is that, as Potter and Wetherell point out, academics are trained to read for gist. Discourse analysis requires detailed reading and analysis in terms of effects. Initial coding was carried out in order to make the data manageable. Following Potter and Wetherell (1987:167) coding was done as inclusively as possible with pragmatic rather than analytical goals. Each page was read and re-read several times. A coding frame was developed in order to assist reading the same page in different ways. This technique allowed some 'detachment' although it could not provide 'objectivity'.

The coding categories included attributes of workers, change, common interests (organization/workers), communications, culture, environment /context/markets, HRM v. personnel, measures to meet challenges, morale/motivation/commitment, policies/solutions, structure, training, unions, uniqueness or particularity, and a special category for statements corresponding to *'that's the way the world is'* statements.

All instances, including borderline cases, were marked on a copy of that transcript page, and the pages were placed in separate category files. The relatively few initial categories multiplied rapidly as portions of text could not be included in any of the existing ones. Some categories overlap considerably (in order to ensure inclusiveness) and many instances are included in several categories.

The purpose of coding was not to create a taxonomy or to provide an analysis, but to provide a practical means of grasping such a diverse group of texts. Hence, the coding was as inclusive as possible. Such an approach meant that computerized qualitative data analysis was not suitable. As Richards (1994) in the *NUD.IST Workshop Notes* suggests, 'clarity of principles on which categories are grouped' allows such software to be utilized fully. She goes on to argue that 'to conflate different sorts of categories is to risk losing all the benefits of hierarchical organization, and confusing the meanings of categories'.

In the analysis of discourse about the management of people at work, it is precisely how categories are conflated by discoursing subjects that is at issue. Such conflation and the entanglements of 'rationality' in discourse are essential conditions for the emergence of particular objects.

The coding of the transcripts is not part of any kind of statistical analysis. The categories themselves came from a wide variety of sources - some were functional or administrative (e.g. job title), some were suggested by a discourse analysis of the prescriptive or the critical literature (change, structure, attributes of workers), some seemed to jump off the pages (uniqueness or particularity). Some categories appeared to be very important to the interviewees but have not been included in the research report because there were too few instances.

The significance of the categories at this stage should not be overstated. To use the category 'change' as an example, it was identified as a significant feature of the discourse in the prescriptive literature. However, the fact that every interview had more than five pages of transcript marked up in the 'change' category is not in itself significant.

A second reason why the number of instances where transcripts were marked for 'change' is interviewer bias. Notwithstanding the discussions elsewhere about the impossibility of white-coated, scientific, sociological investigation, interviewer bias cannot be ignored while the consequences are used as part of the explanation. In the case of

'change', although few questions asked specifically about change, the introductory letter indicated that the research project was looking at the extent to which human resource policies have changed and developed.

As discourse analysis challenges the possibility of 'scientific' objectivity, there was a willingness to 'engage' interviewees, although this stopped considerably short of challenging them.

APPENDIX I I - DISCOURSE AND NON-HR/PERSONNEL MANAGERS

This covers interviews with non-HR/personnel managers from both private and public sectors. Having established in Chapters Five and Seven the idea of the construction of the key objects (environment, organization, individual) in discourse, this appendix proceeds directly to repertoire construction. This avoids some repetition as, although these managers told ‘tales’, the description of ‘tales’ is not included as a separate section.

While the focus of this thesis has been on HR/personnel managers, an examination of the interviews with these other managers is included here to allow an assessment of the extent and ways in which the discourse of HRM/personnel managers is distinct from or similar to other management discourse within organizations. The interviews with managers from the private and public sectors are analysed separately.

The Participants - private sector

Bio-Tech Screens - Head of Biochemistry - Female

Import Motors - Wholesale Manager - Male

Easyway - Management Information Systems Manager - Male

XYZ News - Head of Technical Operations - Male

The construction of ‘repertoires’

In this section it is argued that the interviews with private sector non-HR/personnel managers can be captured within just one of the two repertoires - repertoire A. This is not to argue that there is no ‘duality’ in the interviews, but that any additional repertoires do not concern the management of people at work and, therefore, are not included in this analysis.

Bio-Tech Screens

The clearest example of repertoire A was provided by Bio-Tech Screens. In answer to the question ‘Can you tell me what you consider to be the major challenge facing your organization today?’ the Head of Biochemistry said:

HB: *Well the world outside is very competitive for biotechnology companies these days. So I think our major challenge is really to prove that we are the best at what we do. I think organizationally in order to be able to do that we need to look at the people we employ and we need to make sure that we get the best out of what they are able to do and give them the opportunities they need to build the skills that are required to prove the company is the best* (Bio-Tech/b:1).

The key objects were constructed in a number of 'tales' throughout the interview, but the most important point to note is that the relationship between the key objects is presented as largely unproblematic. People were seen as unproblematic because of their '*psyche...these days*' and the realization that '*they are not going to have jobs necessarily for a long time*'. According to this manager they are motivated and dedicated to working at Bio-Tech because it provides very valuable experience. The problems with employees that have occurred are mainly attributed to coincidence - injuries, sporting injuries - and to the characteristics of the organization, particularly the growth of the company and the effect on culture change and infrastructure. In this interview it is '*the world today*' that determines the way that organizations will be developed. However, '*there isn't any one answer*' to how organizations are structured. The different departments at Bio-Tech may be organized along '*completely different lines*' and are organized to achieve the outputs according to the '*task*'.

In the Bio-Tech interview, the key objects are brought into alignment and ordered by the construction of the environment as *competitive*, by the organization having to *prove* itself to be the best, and by the *need* to recruit and develop the right staff to provide that proof.

Import Motors

At Import Motors, most of the interview concerns the environment and the organization and the relationships between them. The problems connected with people were constructed in terms of the remoteness of decision-makers from the operation and the consequences of the '*cold hard facts*' of business and survival in business. The problem for the wholesale manager was one of being '*in the middle*' between remote decision-makers

and the people those decisions were going to affect. The resolution of this problem of torn loyalty to your staff *'but at one and the same time recognising what has got to happen'* is articulated in terms of the personal attributes of the middle managers - open, committed, diplomatic, and prepared to *'carry the fight'*:

DB: ...*convincing the people at the top that if this decision has got to happen then, for Gods sake, make sure it's going to hit the right people at the right level...* (Import Motors/b:11).

In this interview at Import Motors, the three key objects are brought into alignment and ordered by the discipline of the *'facts'* of exchange rates and business cycles. The exchange rates is presented as *'something we have absolutely no control over'*. The *'so-called recovery'* in the car market is dismissed as *'crap'*: the market is described as *'fragile'* and *'volatile'*. The activities of competitors - big manufacturers - offering huge price reductions leads to difficulties for smaller operations like Import Motors. However, they can have direct control over their *'destiny'* in terms of advertising, marketing, PR, and negotiations with the supplier for support and improved specifications. Improvements can be made in terms of effectiveness of expenditure and justification and scrutiny of every area of overhead. The consequences experienced by the workforce are *'belt tightening'* and the running of *'a tighter and more streamlined ship'*.

Easyway

Difference to other organizations was a key theme at Easyway. The key difference in the construction of the key objects is that the environment is explained in terms of it being the sales force, but a sales force at arms length: that is, the *'distributors'*. The customers of the distributors are recognised as the end users but they do not feature as very significant in the interview. What is significant is that the relationship between the organization and the distributors is such a strong feature.

At Easyway they '*bear in mind*' that the product must be usable by the end user, but the '*bonding and strength*', the support, and the focus on service are targeted at the distributors.

The uniqueness of the operation does have consequences for recruitment:

ZB: *Erm. This is going to sound absolutely banal and terrible but you tend to get the feeling that there is an Easyway person. That must sound terrible...* (Easyway/b:6).

An '*Easyway person*' is described in terms of the usual group of desirable attributes - plus a sense of humour, bubbly and effervescent. The individual as object is aligned with, and made subject to, the organization by the emphasis on uniqueness and by the particular circumstances of the distributors. So the attributes '*commitment*' and '*flexible*' are important because they have a particular construction. The distributors:

ZB: *...most of the time, they are either working by day and then come back and start the Easyway job in the evening, which is the majority, or they will be talking to other distributors and making presentations, that type of thing, and what we call 'doing the plan' which is trying to recruit, sponsoring new people in. So the chances of me getting to talk to them anywhere between 9 and 5 during the week is remote...* (Easyway/b:6).

Personnel is seen by the management information systems manager as a source of advice and a support service with a strong input into '*virtually all areas*'. Although the personnel procedures are seen as relatively informal, they are starting to be documented - although the Easyway approach is contrasted with the '*procedures and practices and standards*' orientation of personnel departments in other organizations.

XYZ News

At XYZ News, the environment is seen in terms of a market which '*demands more flexibility these days*'. The Head of Technical Operations feels that the economic climate has been bad for a lot of industries, particularly television '*because we were deregulated as well*'. The market comprises of customers who now demand different (i.e. non-ITC) standards - described in terms of the definition of quality under TQM as conformance to customer requirements (see Hill 1991:400). This means that, to meet service requirements, XYZ News needs staff to work '*flexibly*' to different standards for different customers.

However, the main object constructed was the organization. This was first done in terms of a history of *'dramatic changes'*:

XB: *...a few years ago...the biggest challenge was sorting out the ownership. Then it became sorting out our financial controls, because...we ended up losing track of a load of money. Then it became how do we reduce the size of the workforce because of new technology and because of deregulation in the industry. We were suddenly in a position where we could run the operation with far fewer staff... (XYZ News/b:1).*

In the context of this history after these huge problems have subsided the biggest challenge is facing a new future as a profit based company and a truly commercial organization - which they had not been before. From that come issues of *'how do we begin to bring in new business? How do we motivate our staff?'*. The motivation and development of staff is a major problem for two reasons. First, *'they have been through a lot of pain'* in the form of downsizing and salary cuts. Second, because there is little turnover of staff, *'developing people is a dangerous thing'*. The basis of this claim is that staff may be sent on courses but they end up *'doing the same job'*. This means that *'you demotivate them rather than motivate them. And if you don't send them on a course then you demotivate them because they don't think they are making any progress'*.

What is distinctive about this interview is that while the organization is problematized in the environment and the staff are problematized in the organization - repertoire A - solutions which would suggest repertoire B were presented as having failed. For example, as an initiative on motivation, the introduction of an appraisal system is seen as a key development. The roots of the scheme were in performance related pay, introduced to replace an old union agreement before XYZ became a profit based company. PRP gave rise to several problems: *'a lot of anxiety about whether we were right, whether the scheme was right, whether it would ever achieve anything'*. The PRP scheme became too unwieldy as safeguards were built into it: the performance pay component was dropped although appraisals were retained. This is seen as a *'big decision'*. The problem with appraisal is *that 'if you ask the staff what their problems are, what their aspirations are'* this generates a list

of things that they would like to do while there is a lack of resources to implement them. However, the improved communication through appraisals - the '*discipline*' of sitting down with staff for one or two hours a year - '*hardly a great deal but we weren't doing it*' - is seen as a success, as is a policy of giving supervisors more responsibility. Although staff had been '*nervous*' about the appraisal scheme and worried about hidden agendas, they have found the experience of it better than the '*threat*' of it. The appraisal scheme has meant that XYZ News has started to build up data bases of problems, training needs and good ideas. Although this has identified more problems '*they are nice problems to have*'.

So the attempts to change the organization to meet the needs of staff in terms of motivation and development (through PRP and appraisal) are identified as failures but the appraisal scheme in terms of organizational requirements of communication and an improved data base is identified as a success:

XB: ...I think it's about the discipline of a manager sitting down exclusively with a member of his team and talking to them and listening to them and understanding, getting an understanding of what their problems are, how they feel, and then taking some action on that and trying to do what, within the bounds of what's commercial, sensible and what can reasonably be achieved, beginning to try and build up some development (XYZ News/b:3).

Personnel is seen as a source of advice made more essential by the flattening of the management structure which has meant that there is too little time for managers to be up to date on all the legislation and agreements. The devolution of HRM/personnel has, therefore, led to a construction of the remaining centralized HRM/personnel role in terms of expertise. In addition, personnel has a role in consistency in practices across the organization constructing HRM/personnel as a department that takes an overview.

The Participants - public sector

Heritage Housing Association - Director of Development - Male

Heritage Housing Association - Director of Housing Services - Female

Collective Study Division (CSD) - Field Officer - Male

London Borough of Sunhill - Senior Policy Research Officer - Male

The construction of 'repertoires'

As with the interviews with HR/personnel managers in the public sector, the interviews with non-HR/personnel managers are dominated by 'tales' of government finance and policy change. Three of the four interviews can be understood solely in terms of repertoire A.

Heritage Housing Association

Unlike interviews with other managers discussed in this section, the interview with the Director of Development at Heritage Housing Association can be understood in terms of both repertoires. The interview began and ended with a statement of the main objective of the organization. Interestingly, this objective - the '*core mission*' was presented as something that comes from within and from outside of the organization:

YB: *It provides housing for people in necessitous circumstances. We're a charity and stuck with that, statutory, stuck with that definition. I don't mean 'stuck with that' in a difficult sense, but we have that definition imposed upon us* (Heritage/b:1)

In the context of the government financial restrictions and this organizational objective, the '*strategy*' is to:

YB: *...be able to maintain our market share - we are determined not to become an association which only manages stock - we are an association which wants to provide new stock... we are changing our development and strategy in a way that will mean that we will try to operate outside the conventional reduced allocations framework and try to do new and innovative things* (Heritage/b:1)

Heritage have restructured to remove the inefficiencies of the '*inherent departmentalism*' and to implement a '*more corporate approach*' pushing responsibility and accountability down through the organization and working with cross departmental group project teams in a flatter structure.

This approach is characterized as '*trendy*' and '*fashionable*' and was devised with consultants. It is not seen as a guarantee of success because:

YB: *...people group projects tend to move, or potentially have got the potential for moving, at the pace of the slowest common denominator. And I think that peoples' differing abilities are often reflected in their level in the hierarchy...* (Heritage/b:3).

Therefore, the approach could lead to *'mediocrity rather than excellence'* although this Director suspects the result will be somewhere between the two. He finds it *'amazing'* that, whereas what comes down as an edict from the chief executive is resisted by most people at all levels in the organization, *'people from all levels of the organization produce a policy which is not a million miles from that which would have emanated from the management team'*. Such a policy is more *'sellable'* than a management team edict, particularly *'harder policies like getting in on time or cut out the caring leave and that sort of thing'*.

'Distance' appears to be an issue in this organization. He argues that:

YB: *...there is a premium in improved industrial relations and a premium in terms of middle managers not being able to disassociate themselves with what they would call the harder edge of human resource policies if one involves them early on...* (Heritage/b:5).

This approach indicates that the organization has changed to deal with the psychological characteristics of people. While this corresponds to repertoire B, such approaches are aimed, *'first of all'*, at business efficiency *'before we start applauding people for their own personal development'*.

The *'real issue'* for recruitment is at the level of those dealing with *'intellectual ideas'*. He suggests that this requires very specific people: *'we may have to bring in a whiz kid'*. There are three problems with recruitment at this level. First, there are few such high level specialists in the market place. Second, *'head-hunting'* goes against the equal opportunities policies. Third, it may be that Heritage would have to pay significant premiums which may cause distortions in the way that the organization as a whole views salaries. Such *'stresses and strains'* are dealt with by reference to the survival of the organization being *'absolutely critical'*.

'Change' is the most important challenge for another Director of the Heritage HA. The Director of Housing Services suggests it is the changing climate of the future that necessitates a review of objectives and services in order to plan and get the right structures

in place to cope with changes and growth in the next five years - and to avoid constantly having to review. Change comes both from government financial policy and legislation, and from the local authorities. The review of objectives and services has an impact on responsibilities:

MB: ...we haven't been entirely clear about the boundaries of peoples jobs, and who is particularly responsible for different areas. And it's going back to first principles really, what are the objectives of the service that we are providing and how are we providing those and then being very clear that all the way through we've got staff who are absolutely crystal clear about what their job is there to do, and how we can measure whether it is being successful... (Heritage/c:3).

This example constructs a 'rationality' in which external change affects the organization which, in turn, affects the jobs people do. This 'rationality' constructs organizational and individual change as unproblematic and as measurable. The main problematization is in terms of the environment.

Collective Survey Division

At CSD the progressive introduction of market testing requires an organizational response - the development of a '*corporate image*', organizational change, the maintenance of quality, a focus on marketing, cost cutting, TQM, etc., - and the success of that response is crucial because failure means '*we just haven't got enough work for people here to do*'. The contribution of the employees is enhanced by '*making people think more about their job in the context of the work of the office as a whole*'. The (Treasury-inspired) introduction of staff appraisal reports and performance pay link the objectives of the division with a focus on the objectives of people, '*really fixing people in*' in the part that they are playing. Although nobody feels '*comfortable*' about the performance pay, it is '*something that you've got to adjust to, really*'. The appraisal reports are seen as problematic because of the difficulties of standardization and the subjectivity of reporting officers. The system is seen as '*less about measuring performance accurately than about making sure you don't get something that ends up being too expensive*'. The key difficulty

with performance pay is that *'targets can be dangerous, you know, in as far as motivation goes'*.

Personnel at the CSD has devolved administrative functions down to line managers and have more time for an advice and policy role. However, the recommendations of a personnel review have not yet been implemented because of *'more important things'* - mainly redundancy packages.

Sunhill Council

As in the interview with Heritage, much of the interview with Sunhill was concerned with departmentalism. The government financial restrictions and the CCT legislation had effects on the organization of Sunhill Council, but these effects were seen in particular ways because of the organizational structure. Hence, the *'client/contractor split'* was not the only way to deal with CCT but was *'probably the most likely departmental way to deal with CCT'*. The departmentalism was both a *'tradition'* - many local authorities have devolved central functions and some have gone further - and the result of a *'weak centre'* in which the department is seen as the *'main actor'*. This is seen as a consequence of the chief executive not having a *'strong impact'* on organizational management. Therefore, *'finance CCT was seen as a finance department thing, as opposed to an activity which the council carries out'*. The departmentalism is carried by people who *'see themselves as employees of the finance department, or employees of whatever department'* and there are different departmental cultures. The process of devolution is seen in terms of *'empowerment'*. However, it is not the empowerment of individuals, but of front-line departments.

CCT is described as *'a so-called introduction of an internal market'*. This is linked to the departmental structuring in the sense that there is an attempt to move *'from a central organization which says that everything is right, to a more so-called customer orientated organization'*. What that means in practice is *'the central people deciding and to a certain extent talking to their customers'*.

Routine personnel has been devolved to the departments but what is called '*strategic personnel*' has been left at the centre. Strategic personnel includes negotiating with the unions and JCCs, central equalities monitoring (because there is a computerized payroll personnel system which has equalities details on it), some training and positive action schemes, and various policy reviews. The split between routine and strategic personnel is '*the situation we now live with*'.

In this interview, the organization is constructed as determined by environmental factors but, because of the particular circumstances of the council, particular structural features will continue despite the changes.

Summary and Conclusions

The main finding of this appendix is that non-HR/personnel managers do discursively construct organizationally specific and varied 'realities' in which causal relationships are established between the key 'objects' (environment, organization, individual) that are then aligned and ordered in 'specific rationalities' (i.e. repertoires). 'Reality' and 'rationality' are constructed by discursive management practice in which problems and solutions are mutually constituted, managers are 'distanced' from the consequences of management initiatives, and managers and practices are located within an organizational 'reality' that 'makes sense' (i.e. *constructs* sense) for those managers and for other organizational participants.

As in the interviews with HR/personnel managers, the distinction between the private and public sectors dominates public sector discourse and has considerable impact on 'object' and 'repertoire' construction.

Non-HR/personnel managers construct the three key 'objects' in 'tales' in ways that are similar to the constructions in the interviews with HR/personnel managers. The key difference between these interviews and the interviews with HR/personnel managers is that there is less evidence of Repertoire B in either the private or the public sector (although

there was evidence that managers were aware of the logic of Repertoire B). The distinction between HR/personnel managers and other managers appears, therefore, to lie in the way that connections between the key objects are established ²: Repertoire A (environment → organization → individual) dominates the ‘internal logic’ of this discourse.

² This is not to argue that ‘duality’ does not exist in these interviews, but the focus of this research meant that ‘duality’ based on different management discourses was not so easily detectable.

APPENDIX III

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